The New Criterion

March 1999

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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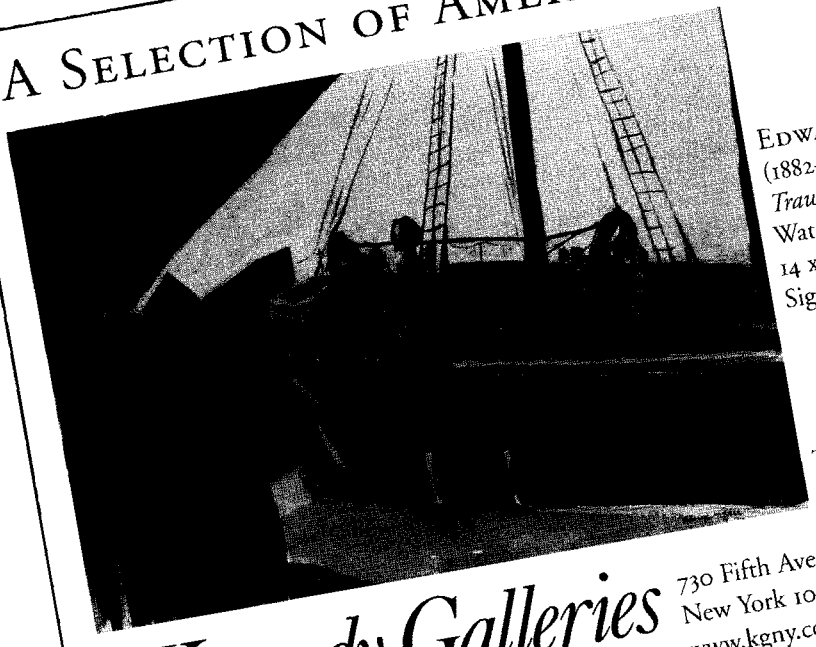

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Notes & Comments: March 1999

A war without armistice

Of the many things that have been said about the agony of President Clinton's impeachment by the U.S. House of Representatives and the sham "trial" that resulted in his acquittal by the U.S. Senate, there seems to have been only one point upon which political factions of every persuasion found it possible to agree: that this whole sordid episode in the nation's history was in many respects the culmination—though by no means the conclusion—of the culture war that has been raging in this country since the emergence of the radical counterculture in the 1960s. Those on the political Left who claimed that the impeachment of the president was really an impeachment of the 1960s weren't entirely wrong. Neither were those on the political Right who had long feared the worst from the pot-smoking, draft-dodging, antiwar activist with a history of sexual misconduct who had come to occupy the White House. Both were reflecting upon the same historical reality—the reality of an immoralist in the nation's highest office. The only difference was that while the Left looked upon this reality as a vindication, the Right understood it to be a national catastrophe.

This is not to say that there were not many grave Constitutional issues involved in the resolution of this bitter conflict, and it is certainly not to say that the prosperity of the American economy in the 1990s did not also play a major role in determining the outcome of what Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan correctly described as "a crisis of the regime." Both contributed a great deal to the discordant public responses to the impeachment process: on the one hand, a feeling of deep foreboding that quickly reduced the political establishment in Washington to a condition of fear and trembling; and on the other, a feeling of complacency and indifference—moral indifference—on the part of a public eager to avert its glance from anything, no matter how loathsome, that might disturb its sense of its own security and comfort.

Yet in retrospect it can clearly be seen that both the Constitutional issues and the economic factors, however important they have been to the outcome, were finally ancillary to what this ghastly proceeding was mainly about: a culture war that preceded Bill Clinton's election to the Presidency but which his outrageous and unlawful conduct in the White House—and the personal history he brought to that exalted office—had come to epitomize for anyone with the wit to understand what has been the most divisive issue in American life for a third of this century. The culture war that originated in the political and moral uproars of the 1960s

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has never been a conflict over contending economic ideas or economic reforms. From the outset it has been a conflict about the conduct of life. Its targets have rarely included big business, which, if anything, has grown bigger and bigger over the course of the cultural revolution which the radical movement of the 1960s set in motion, and is nowadays often in the hands of the offspring of the counterculture. The primary targets of the culture war have been the institutions of marriage and the family, and its principal battleground has been a sexual revolution that has made any reference to marital vows and family values an object of derision and contempt. These the incendiaries of the counterculture have largely succeeded in deconstructing in the name of a personal emancipation that acknowledges neither moral obligation nor legal constraint. As a consequence, we live today in a culture of moral ruin.

That the President of the United States has now come to personify this moral ruin *is* a catastrophe from which the country will not soon recover. That his perjuries and other violations of law have been exonerated amid a chorus of denunciations of the president's behavior only adds still another disabling layer of moral hypocrisy to the horrific spectacle of political cowardice and ethical failure the country has been made to endure. For it has made the U.S. Senate—and thus, by implication, the entire country—complicit in the president's misdeeds. Impeachment without removal, crime without punishment, profligacy without accountability—this is the legacy with which the moral fiasco of the Clinton presidency burdens the nation as it enters a new millennium. This is the nature of that famous "bridge" the president promised to build to the twenty-first century. This is indeed the crisis that the thirty-year culture war has brought upon us, and there is no armistice in sight. "Complete moral tolerance," wrote James Fitzjames Stephen over a hundred years ago, "is possible only when men have become completely indifferent to each other—that is to say, when society is at an end." That end has not yet come, but in President Clinton's triumph in the culture war he has brought us closer to its brink than any other leader in our history.

A louse and a flea

Asked who was worse, Voltaire or Rousseau, Dr. Johnson is said to have replied: "Sir, it is not for me to apportion the degree of iniquity between a louse and a flea." In addition to prompting the melancholy reflections outlined above, the impeachment proceedings frequently reminded us of Johnson's remark. The spectacle emanating from Washington presented many unpalatable choices. Perhaps the most unpalatable—though paradoxically also among the most satisfying—concerned the clash between the left-wing British journalist Christopher Hitchens and his (now former) friend, the left-wing Clinton factotum Sidney Blumenthal.

Like many on the far Left, Mr. Hitchens loathes Bill Clinton with a passion most Republicans can only admire from afar. Nevertheless, he had long been friends with Mr. Blumenthal, who bears the faintly Orwellian title of "senior White House communications aide." Mr. Blumenthal had long been rumored to have been a source of disparaging innuendo about . . . well, about many people, including the characterization of Monica Lewinsky as a "stalker." Mr. Blumenthal denied under oath to a grand jury that he had leaked such rumors to journalists. His lawyer, with what now seems to have been misplaced bravado, publicly released journalists from confidentiality and challenged them to contradict Mr. Blumenthal. After receiving a call from a counsel for the House Judiciary Committee, Mr. Hitchens and his wife obliged: both swore out affidavits asserting that

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during a lunch in March 1998 Mr. Blumenthal several times described Ms. Lewinsky as a "stalker" and President Clinton as her "victim." Another journalist, Scott Armstrong, later swore out a third affidavit stating that Mr. Hitchens had told him about Mr. Blumenthal's alleged remarks shortly after the lunch took place.

If perjury were something that officials in the Clinton White House, like other Americans, could be held liable for, Mr. Blumenthal might well be investigated by the Justice Department. Frankly, we very much doubt that this will happen. But Mr. Hitchens's decision to turn on his old friend has sparked a general outcry against him among journalists, most of whom embrace the ethic of E. M. Forster who famously declared that he would rather betray his country than his friend. The savageness of the attack has been instructive. For example, the left-wing columnist Alexander Cockburn, writing in the *New York Press*, produced a model of character assassination masquerading as criticism. Often, Mr. Cockburn surmised, Mr. Hitchens must have wondered what it would feel like "to plant the Judas kiss." "Indeed, an attempted physical embrace has often been part of the rehearsal. Many's the time male friends have had to push Christopher's mouth, fragrant with martinis, away, as, amid the welcomes and goodbyes, he seeks their cheek or lips." Mr. Cockburn proceeded to describe his former friend as "a Judas and a snitch," a "compulsive tattler and gossip" who gets a "quasi-sexual" frisson "out of the act of tattling or betrayal." "The surest way to get a secret into mass circulation," Mr. Cockburn reported, "is to tell it to Hitchens, swearing him to silence as one does so."

Unpleasant, yes. But Mr. Cockburn clearly believed he had something even worse up his sleeve. For after this warm-up he went on to compare Mr. Hitchens to . . . George Orwell—also a "snitch," according to Mr. Cockburn, since, as was recently revealed, he had furnished British intelligence (the British "secret police" to Mr. Cockburn) with a list of Communists and fellow-travelers at the onset of the Cold War. Yet another reason to admire Orwell, in our view, but indisputably damning for those of Mr. Cockburn's political persuasion. We have no idea what Mr. Hitchens thinks of the outrage directed against him by his erstwhile friends. About the comparison with George Orwell, though, he should rest easy. To alter a famous phrase, Christopher Hitchens is no George Orwell.

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The betrayal of liberalism: VII

The bright line: liberalism & religion

by Jean Bethke Elshtain

It is not at all clear whether contemporary liberalism, in its many modes of expression, has betrayed its own tradition in relation to religion or, rather, if what we are witnessing is a gradual and more complete display of liberalism's constitutive principles in its dealings with religion. The standard treatment of liberalism and religion tells us that liberalism saved religion from itself—that is, liberalism saved religion from its bloodcurdling excesses and absolutist demands. It is said that by forcing a regime of "toleration" on religion, liberalism in its constitutional forms demanded that religion act more humanely. And so it came to pass that both sides—"sectarian" groups (meaning religious groups, of course) and non-sectarian groups (all the others organized along the lines of the liberal mandate)—have learned to live happily or at least safely with one another. But this truce is insistently represented as fragile. If religion threatens to get "out of hand"—that is, if believers threaten to take their religion seriously—it must be beaten back. No sooner does someone mention school prayer, for example, than religious wars and even the Spanish Inquisition get trotted out as warnings. Never mind that such horrors are scarcely serious historic possibilities in late twentieth-century American democracy: the specter of the return of the Spanish Inquisition—perhaps under the auspices of the notorious "Christian Right"—is regularly held up as the greatest danger we face from a resurgent and, by definition, intolerant and absolutist commitment to religion. I do not think school prayer is a good idea, but not because I believe inquisitors are just around the corner.

Still, this is the usual story one hears when the subject of liberalism and religion comes up. But there are other ways to tell the story of the relation between liberalism and religion. Alternative explanations do not possess the "self-evident" status that the accepted liberal narrative enjoys in our culture. And the very complexity of the topic makes any attempt to examine the relationship between religion and liberalism a daunting task in which much that is important will be left out. Still, a closer look cannot help but complicate the tidy story of liberalism's triumph over religious intolerence.

A bit of historical background is necessary. Let's rummage in the pre-liberal past for a moment or two. Before the emergence of those social-contract theories associated with liberalism (though not with liberalism exclusively), all assumptions about governance and rule held that government's legitimacy turned on a divine mandate. This didn't necessarily mean that a ruler governed absolutely or tyrannically; indeed, a ruler could violate the office which was his sacred trust, go from being king to being tyrant, and be openly punished by tyrannicide. The major point is that rulers were beholden to a greater power outside themselves: they held their office in trust. In

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theory, this accountability to a higher power was meant to stay the hand of those driven to excess. The record is uneven, of course, as to just how much restraint was afforded by the assumption that a ruler's legitimacy was accorded by God. At the same time, societies were dotted with networks of communal and corporate bodies functioning autonomously. The university, an invention of the Middle Ages, is a good example of an autonomous communal institution into which the king's writ did not run. Families were intergenerational and extended, and this afforded a good measure of social power and protection. Most importantly, religion and civic standing were tethered together. You could not be a subject in good standing unless you were a communicant is good standing.

Locke drew up a strong civic map with religion within one sphere and government in another. A person could be a citizen of each so long as that citizen never attempted to merge and to blend the two. So, in the religious domain, one answered God's call. But step out of that domain and take one step into the civic realm and God doesn't figure directly any more.

All of this was to change. With the coming of greater commerce, the breakup of medieval Christendom, the centralization and solidification of monarchies and principalities, and, in 1555, the religious Peace of Augsburg, the enshrining of *cuius regio* (namely, that the faith of the ruler was the faith of his kingdom), Western Europe moved decisively into a new era. Religion and the status of being a political subject continued to be mutually constitutive. But this, too, changed dramatically with the full dissolution of the familiar political and social world in the wake of the Enlightenment. Powerful new sources of legitimation were located for earthly rule. More and more, legitimacy was vested with the people, with subjects who contracted for that purpose.

Enter the social-contract thinkers. To lump, as we do, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau together as social-contract thinkers isn't that helpful because their differences are far more interesting than their similarities. Hobbes is so idiosyncratic I'll not spend time on him. For our purposes, Locke and Rousseau are, and remain, important. Locke, associated famously with his *Essay on Toleration* as well as his treatises on government, insisted, as a precondition for civil government, that religion and government had to have lines drawn between them. The seeds of the privatization of religion are here sown; they were to germinate and flower powerfully and completely in our own time.

Basically, Locke drew up a strong civic map with religion within one sphere and government in another. A person could be a citizen of each so long as that citizen never attempted to merge and blend the two. So, in the religious domain, one answered God's call. But step out of that domain and take one step into the civic realm and God doesn't figure directly any more. One's fidelity is pledged to the magistrate and to the proper business of governing. If the magistrate should egregiously overstep his bounds, there is always the "appeal to heaven" and the possibility of revolution. All religions—save atheism and Roman Catholicism—are to be tolerated. Disobedience must take place only in the most extreme situations. Most of the time, religion and government need not meet one another directly. But when they do, religion must always defer to government. In effect, religion is consigned to irrelevancy. Note here that, in the words of the constitutional

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scholar Michael McConnell, "Locke's exclusion of atheists and Catholics from toleration cannot be dismissed as a quaint exception to his beneficent liberalism; it follows logically from the ground on which his argument for toleration rested. If religious freedom meant nothing more than that religion should be free so long as it is irrelevant to the state, it does not mean very much." Why? Because religion has been privatized and its meaning reduced to the subjective spiritual well-being of religious practitioners.

Madison picked up certain aspects of Locke; Jefferson, others. Locke was certainly *primus inter pares* of social contractarians for the founders of the American republic, some of whom (Jefferson most notably) held views about the salutary nature of religious indifference not embraced by the vast majority of their fellow countrymen and women. But the Lockean formula had finessed as many problems as it attempted to solve. For it is not at all clear that most human beings can seal themselves off into compartments and be believers one moment, good subjects of the king the next. Instead, and necessarily, the categories bleed into one another. But the "proper spheres" argument persisted, tethered to a wildly optimistic view that religious and governmental jurisdiction would rarely conflict. The only sure guarantee of that would be to render religion utterly privatized and publicly irrelevant. This was something that Locke didn't preach. But his writings helped to pave the way.

Here Rousseau enters as a shadow around the liberal disestablishmentarian project. He understood that you couldn't demarcate spheres so tidily. In fact, what all governments and polities require, especially at their founding, is a civil religion of some sort or another that constantly buttresses the legitimacy and authority of the civic entity in question. Civil religion welded together the different parts of the polity and demanded that citizens, through a form of civic membership in which religion was subordinated to the good of the polity, make ongoingly manifest their devotion to public life. Rousseau even wrote up a constitution for Poland in which he spoke keenly of civic games, quasi-religious rituals, and the need for public display of patriotism. Any person who was divided in his loyalty and allegiance could never be a full-fledged participant in the *patrie.* A form of enlightened, reasonable civil religion was the glue that held the polity together. No one was exempted from this civil religion. Loyalty to the state is the ultimate loyalty that trumps all other forms of fidelity.

Rousseau moves with vehemence against strong forms of Christianity, like Catholicism, because they inevitably put a man at odds with himself. Believers are easily confused as to where their allegiances lie. They are placed, intolerably, under a dual obligation. Rousseau describes this situation with contempt, Catholicism taking the major beating as a religion so manifestly hideous that he couldn't understand why it persisted. One way or the other, Rousseau in order to redirect all the loyalty to the state aimed to break down Catholicism's presence as an institutional form, buttress, and sustainer of loyalty and commitment to something other than the state. There can be no "private religion" in Rousseau's ideal polity. There is only civil religion or no religion at all, though Rousseau makes it pretty clear that civil religion is a necessary buttress to government and rule.

It is a short distance from Rousseau's declaration that the only good religion is a civil religion to the very different pronouncements of John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty.* Mill is adamantly opposed to civil religions. For him, civil religion represents an intolerable fusion of power. But he extends his animus to religion in general. According to Mill, religion plays to the "worse" parts of human nature. It has always been a retrograde force, standing in the way of reason, progress, and enlightenment. If religion still survives, Mill thinks, it does so as an atavism living on borrowed time. One day soon, in the wake of spread-

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ing enlightenment, all that is unreasoning instinct will be supplanted by all that is reason. In fact, Mill assumes a unanimity of moral and political beliefs among those individuals who are enlightened by reason. For ultimately, according to Mill, reason must speak in one voice.

In practice this meant that the ignorant or the irrational must defer to those—like Mill himself, naturally—who have attained enlightenment and learned to speak in the voice of reason. Mill's insistence that one must attain an "apotheosis of Reason" and reject utterly the "idolatry" of instinct not only meant that religion would be privatized but also that it would be saddled with the burden of being responsible for most of history's horrors. Finally, Mill taught that only the weak require the "superstition" of religion. The strong do not need religious milk with their enlightened tea. This Millian backdrop helps to make intelligible a lecture I attended thirty-five-or-so years ago as an undergraduate, delivered by Sir Julian Huxley, who announced in booming stentorian tones that by the year 2000 the remaining atavisms and superstitions would all have vanished—poof!—in the cool, clear light of reason. The two most important superstitions slated for obliteration: religion and nationalism. This is what one calls a failed prognostication.

Now: how did things fare on America's shores? How far did the writ of Locke, Rousseau, and Mill run? There are several analytic and historic tracks down which one must move simultaneously in this matter. Let's call them the constitutional and the popular. The constitutional track is powerfully defined by the First Amendment's protection against establishment and guarantee of free exercise. One could make the case that the astonishing evidence of Americans exercising religions freely, from the inception to the present, turns precisely on non-establishment. This may not have been what the framers expected to happen. But it does show that non-establishment of religion not only is not necessarily deadly to religion, but also may help it to flourish.

But there are tensions and strains in this picture that draw together the popular and constitutional tracks and help us to account for the fact that so many American citizens who are religious believers believe that their society has acted in ways that betray its commitment to the free exercise of religion in any robust sense. From the inception of settlement on these new shores, American democracy has been premised on the enactment of projects that were a complex intermingling of religious and political imperatives. The majority of Americans were religious seekers and believers who saw in communal liberty the freedom to be religious rather than freedom from religion. It is, therefore, not surprising that such a huge chunk of American juridical life has been devoted to sorting out the often inaptly named church-state debate. In a less churched society this would be a far less salient issue.

If religion still survives, Mill thinks, it does so as an atavism living on borrowed time. One day soon, in the wake of spreading enlightenment, all that is unreasoning Instinct will be supplanted by all that is Reason. . . . In practice this meant that the ignorant or the irrational must defer to those—like Mill himself, naturally—who have attained enlightenment and learned to speak in the voice of reason.

In a way, it is meet to argue that America embodies the best of what the West in general deeded to future generations in this matter: a refusal of theocracy, a proliferation of religions. A differentiation between poli-

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tics and religion was sown early on in Western culture with the emergence of various forms of papal doctrine distinguishing the *regnum* from the *sacerdotum*, roughly marking the swords of the earthly and spiritual kingdoms respectively. The two got all tangled up with one another, to be sure, but they were nonetheless distinct. What Locke attempted to do was to drive politics and religion apart in order to promote "toleration," but at the price of privatizing religion over time. What Rousseau attempted to do was to fuse politics and religion into one in the service of politics. What American citizens did under the umbrella of non-establishment was to proliferate churches all over the country as public institutions that, rather than challenging government routinely, instead reminded people of what membership in a body requires, thereby sustaining those civic habits that Tocqueville extolled in *Democracy in America*.

Ever present, of course, was the possibility that the church or churches might be a locus for dissent—for religious believers did claim dual citizenships that theoretically could conflict. Indeed, such conflict would be nigh inevitable as too much of the same territory is claimed by both politics and religion. Thus Tocqueville: religion in general contributes to the maintenance of a democratic republic by directing the mores and helping, thereby, to regulate political life. Tocqueville insisted that the ideas of Christianity and liberty are so completely intermingled that if you tried to sever religion from democracy in America you would wind up destroying democracy. Democracy, he further claimed, needs the sort of transcendent justification that religion helps to provide; thus, the eighteenth-century philosophers were wrong about the weakening of religion. "It is tiresome," notes Tocqueville ironically, "that the facts do not fit their theory at all." Surprisingly, the separation of church and state—a secular state—had led to a society that was anything but secular. Perhaps, deep down, Americans understood that religion feeds hope and is thus attached to a constitutive principle of human nature. Amidst the flux and tumult of a rambunctious democratic politics, religion shaped and mediated the passions. Were the day to come when those passions got unleashed upon the world unrestrained, then we would arrive at an unhappy moment indeed, a dreary world Tocqueville called democratic despotism.

So where's the problem? Where's the betrayal and what, precisely, is betrayed? Over the last half century during which, if anything, religious belief and church attendance have waxed and waned but are now at high if not record levels, constitutional law has moved to privatize religion altogether. The strong separationists held sway in constitutional adjudication. By "strong separationist" I mean one who seeks not only a properly secular state—which we have—but also a thoroughly secularized society, one stripped of any and all public markers and reminders of religion. Religion must be thoroughly privatized. It must become invisible to public life. There is in this position a built-in animus against the determination by religious denominations to sustain their own network of schools, welfare provision, political advocacy, and so on. It presupposes a harsh opposition between Enlightenment values and religious faith. Because there is a wall of separation between religion and society on the level of what holds a democratic society together—a unity that religion always threatens to disrupt—the secular state goes on a rampage and gobbles up society so that it, too, might be thoroughly secularized. That, at least, is the dream outcome for ardent separationists. For some reason, members of the school of liberal analysis that push this sort of thing, folks who can get misty-eyed at any mention of the "marginalized" or "subaltern groups", turn terminator and chomp at the bit with ferocious enthusiasm at the prospect of shutting up "religious people." The bright line separating church and state must now extend to religion and politics generally. Religion, cut off from any supply lines, goes on life sup-

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port and eventually that Julian Huxley dream will be fulfilled: religion will have been, first, privatized and then "disappeared."

To be sure, the Supreme Court may, in *Agostini* v. *Felton* (June 23, 1997), have signaled a mild turning away from such holdings. The challenge in that case revolved around the stipulation that federally funded programs providing supplemental, remedial instruction to disadvantaged children could not be administered by "sectarian schools" without violating the establishment clause. This had led, in practice, to the spectacle of mobile units perched outside parochial and other religious schools as children, even children with severe disabilities, in weather fair or foul, were removed from their school buildings and taken to these units in order to receive instruction. The Court (5–4) no longer believes that the mere physical placement of public employees on parochial school grounds "inevitably results in the impermissible effect of state-sponsored indoctrination or constitutes a symbolic union between government and religion."

Still and all, the general drive along the constitutional track is not limited to decisions made by courts. What has emerged as a hallmark of liberal political philosophy is a position I shall tag "liberal monism," by which I mean the view that all institutions internal to a democratic society must conform to a single principle of authority (one person, one vote, or some such); a single standard of what counts as reason and deliberation (here Mill and his followers); and a single vocabulary of political discussion (as represented, for example, by the thinking of the political philosopher John Rawls). Democracy in this sense is defined in such a way that religion must be kept marginalized. Reason is defined in such a way that faith is stigmatized as irrationalism, a peculiar atavism, or a form of private solace that must be kept utterly out of the public square. Those who adhere to this position, or a version of it, typically begin by conjuring up the menace of religious establishment or the specter of advancing hordes of priests and televangelists. Then they go on to construct their bright-line forms of defense. This powerful contemporary school, associated with the work of John Rawls (but not with him alone), holds that when religious persons enter the public sphere they are obliged to do so in a secular civic idiom short of any explicit reference to religious commitment and belief. Christians, Jews, Muslims, as citizens, are not permitted to give reasons for why they favor or oppose a public policy measure, say, in any way that is explicitly religious. If you cannot translate the position into a language proclaimed to be both civic and neutral, you should keep quiet rather than enter public life on illegitimate terms that might threaten America's ostensible working consensus.

> *What American citizens did under the umbrella of nonestablishment was to proliferate churches all over the country as public institutions that, rather than challenging government routinely, instead reminded people of what membership in a body requires, thereby sustaining those civic habits that Tocqueville extolled in* Democracy in America.

Partisans of the liberal monist position claim that they acknowledge and even celebrate religious plurality and diversity. In fact, their position fosters a form of pluralism that requires uniformity and that winds up excluding religion. Indeed, liberal monism requires that the free exercise clause can be interpreted out of existence as an unfortunate glitch in the totally secular

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framework the framers supposedly really intended to set up. All this is accomplished in the name of "neutrality," but in fact what we see at work in liberal monism is a way of life that values certain aspects and features of the human condition and despises and belittles others.

There are many straws in the wind, finally, in the matter of liberalism and its betrayal where religion is concerned. Surely one of the most fundamental concerns the view that liberalism requires as an absolute principle and relentless practice the squeezing of the last breath of life out of anything that presents itself as religious in any public way. A more capacious liberalism—aware of life's variability and nuance, aware that any endorsement of rules and procedures is a substantive one that embraces, if only tacitly, some version of a good life in contrast to some other, and understanding that self-governance requires real social locations where people can learn what it means to act and to be acted upon and what membership and responsibility entail—is not driven to and would never support the intolerances of liberal monism. Liberalism in this more capacious sense is protective, not destructive, of plurality, understanding that pluralism is an empty word unless there are real social institutions and spaces that enable persons to keep alive their own traditions, habits, and preciously held beliefs.

That more general model—one that is within our historic reach—seems to have faded from the scene as claims about what it takes to create social harmony and make citizens embrace more of the coloration of the liberal monist posture. In his last major address before his death in 1996, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin spoke at Georgetown University about the role of religion in American society. He pointed out the incoherence of claiming to respect religious belief while simultaneously insisting that people keep it to themselves—precisely what a devout person cannot do. For religious faith isn't a private matter; it is constitutive of membership in a particular body—the church, the temple, the mosque, the synagogue. Persons of faith cannot bracket their beliefs when they enter the public square.

In viewing religious belief as a civic peril, we invite irony. We fret about belief that is too ardent but also about the loss of belief in America at present, the loss of democratic faith. If we push too far the notion that, in order to be acceptable public fare, all religious claims and categories must be secularized, we wind up depluralizing our policy and endangering our democracy.

Cardinal Bernardin's reaction to these specific concerns was to insist that the logic of church-state separation—"narrow, juridical, and institutional in character"—not be extended to encompass religion and politics in a democratic civil society. Civil society involves the many networks, institutions, associations and relationships that lie beyond the purview of the state's writ. It is a terrible mistake to carry the logic of church-state separation over into this realm. Were such separation to be fully effected, "we would be a poorer culture and society." To skeptics, Bernardin submitted three ways in which religion has necessarily a public role: in articulating a consistent ethic of life against reckless maniacs like Dr. Kevorkian (as but one example); in contributing in civil society through religiously based institutions in education, health care, family service, and "direct outreach to the poorest parts of our society"; and, finally, in the realm of civil and moral formation because religion teaches service to one's neighbor and a sense of civic stewardship.

Real pluralism gives all religious believers the space to be both Catholic and American, Jewish and American, evangelical and American, Muslim and American. Real pluralism is precisely what liberal monism, through relentless privatization, would eliminate. Perhaps the constitutional lawyers will hear the message. Perhaps many already have. But there are forms of extreme separationism being made at the moment that go far beyond anything we have thus far seen and that aim precisely to curb free

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exercise. Published in prestigious law journals, these extreme versions of separationism await their chance to erupt into public policy and to drive, at long last, the stake into the heart of religion that one version of liberalism believes should have happened long ago. It is important to note that these arguments for total separation of religion from public life are not exclusively elite contestations having little or no effect on the actual social practice. On the contrary, many Americans have accepted without a whimper the contention that religion must be privatized if tolerance is to be maintained. They have, in other words, embraced the liberal-monist form of pluralism according to which "diversity" is championed so long as everyone lines up behind the liberal mandate. The incessant hammering on religion as a private affair has been absorbed as civic gospel truth. In his recent book, *One Nation, After All*, the sociologist Alan Wolfe surveys the attitudes of middle-class Americans from different regions of the country. And he wonders if what is being displayed really counts as "tolerance," although he doesn't suggest an alternative. Because what Wolfe's middle-class respondents simply assume is that religion is a private matter to be discussed only reluctantly.

What is disquieting about the words of many of Wolfe's respondents is the undercurrent of brittle fearfulness—fearfulness of the open expression of serious disagreement and religious difference. The general view goes like this: If I am quiet about what I believe and everybody else is quiet about what he or she believes, then nobody interferes with the rights of anybody else. But this is precisely what real believers—whether believers in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "beloved community," or in fighting economic inequality on grounds of justice, or in opposing the current abortion regime or capital punishment—cannot do: keep quiet. To tell religious believers that they must keep quiet because to speak out would by definition be to interfere with my rights is a prescription for intolerance. It is, in effect, to tell folks they cannot really believe what they believe or be who they are.

The grand liberal meta-narrative of the terrible and ever-present danger posed to liberalism by religion has worked. Beneath every expression of religious differences lies lurking, if we believe Wolfe's respondents, a fear of religious intolerance and even religious warfare. So Wolfe's middle-class respondents are disturbed when religion is taken out of the public sphere. But a private religion, as they surely know, makes no sense. One must have public expression of a faith in order for it to be faith. That is, religion either expresses itself in social, communal, public meetings, rules, and symbols or strives for such modes of expression in situations where these are forbidden. Even if they have not read John Rawls, many of the respondents in Wolfe's book have absorbed his message: they, too, believe that public expression of religious beliefs or religiously based argument is already crossing a line and somehow "forcing" something on somebody else.

Partisans of the liberal-monist position claim that they acknowledge and even celebrate religious plurality and diversity. In fact, their position fosters a form of pluralism that requires uniformity and that winds up excluding religion. Indeed, liberal monism requires that the free exercise clause can be interpreted out of existence as an unfortunate glitch in the totally secular framework the framers supposedly really intended to set up.

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Consider the remarks of Jody Fields, one of Wolfe's respondents: "If you are a Hindu and you grew up being a Hindu, keep it to yourself. Don't impose your religion, and don't make me feel bad because I do this and you do this." I submit that this isn't tolerance at all but, rather, an intolerance of religious pluralism. If one changes Hindu to Jew in the comment that becomes clearer. Telling a Hindu to hide being Hindu is scarcely a picture of liberal pluralism. There are others in Wolfe's study who do venture toward robust tolerance because they endorse robust public expression of religious belief. They want to learn more about "what Muslims do," so "don't wipe out culture, add to it." Religious freedom by no means requires privatization of such a thoroughgoing nature that it is intolerable for religion to present any public face to the world. But, over all, Wolfe's work suggests that the continuing privatization of religion within our constitutional law has helped to fuel and solidify a privatization within the culture. Religion becomes one of the things it is best not to talk about.

In his recent book *The Dissent of the Governed*, the legal scholar Stephen Carter reflects on these trends. His primary target is the courts and the fact that any disobedience to court decrees has come to seem un-American. Part of the reason for this is that, in Carter's view, the secular liberals that predominate in the law find it almost impossible to imagine that "there are people to whom faith is more important than particular political ends." The upshot is the alienation of tens of millions of voters. They haven't gone easily into that privatized silence. They are angry and feel as if they are somehow unwelcome in America. What Carter calls "liberal constitutionalism" and I call "liberal monism" has played a huge role in presuming that America could and should create a nationwide "single community" with "enforceable understandings" of how everything is to be organized. Families, as a result, have been stripped of religious freedom in many concrete ways, including freedom to educate their children in a faith tradition. Here so many costly barriers are placed in the pathways of parents that most acquiesce and send their children to state schools.

"Tolerance," Carter reminds us, "is not simply a willingness to listen to what others have to say. It is also a resistance to the quick use of state power—the exclusive prerogative of violent force, remember—to force dissenters and the different to conform." Carter points to the pro-life protest and the ways in which attempts to quash this form of public advocacy have proceeded apace with the blessing of the courts.

A private religion makes no sense. One must have public expression of a faith in order for it to be faith. That is, religion either expresses itself in social, communal, public meetings, rules, symbols or strives for such modes of expression in situations where these are forbidden.

By setting up as paradigmatic the view that the nation must be morally more or less the same, pluralism is denied and community autonomy is eroded by force of law. All of this goes back to the notion, monistic at base, that a human being cannot simultaneously serve two masters or handle two complex and at times, perhaps, conflicting sets of claims. This view gives democratic citizens little credit. It also equates democracy with one strand of liberalism, the strand that has most assiduously pushed for acceptance of the view that it and it alone is a neutral position, permitting all others to flourish, when it is, in fact, a highly ideological position that compels others to shut up or disappear.

Thus, one finds law professors who argue that we need more, not less, government regulation of sectarian bodies since the

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presence of religion in public expression is anomalous in any case. And some feminist jurisprudentialists insist that in fact every single institution in American society should be compelled legally to conform to standard liberal modes of representation and legitimation in their internal organization (all associations must look alike and sprout analogous forms of administration).

So it is perhaps not too much to fret about a future moment in which authentic religious toleration, dependent on robust pluralism, will become a thing of the past. Behold the spectacle: Orthodox Jews compelled to give up the external insignia of their faith. Catholic hospitals and doctors forced to perform abortions on pain of punitive measures and the Catholic Church, additionally, not in its time (which is not liberalism's time) but in a court's time is forced to ordain women priests. All Christian schools and academies are force-fed some national agenda from which none is permitted to waver. Behold, then, the loss of the free exercise of religion as genuine liberty is forlorn and conformity prevails: Rousseau wins. At that point we would be in a world different from the one we now inhabit in the thoroughgoingness of it all. America would no longer be a liberal democracy but, rather, a betrayer of liberalism's most capacious premises and promises.

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What the Sixties wrought

by Roger Kimball

"One is clever and knows everything that has ever happened: so there is no end of derision. One still quarrels, but one is soon reconciled—else it might spoil the digestion.

"One has one's little pleasure for the day and one's little pleasure for the night, but one has a regard for health.

"'We have invented happiness,' say the last men, and they blink."
—Friedrich Nietzsche

We have here the peculiarly American way of digesting continental despair. It is nihilism with a happy ending.
—Allan Bloom

Where's the outrage?
—Bob Dole

The Sixties, it seems, have become less the name of a decade than of a provocation. As a slice of history, the purple decade actually encompasses nearly twenty years. It begins some time in the 1950s and lasts at least until the mid-1970s. And it means—what? Sexual "liberation," rock music, chemically induced euphoria—nearly everyone would agree with that, even though some would inscribe a plus sign, others a minus sign beside that famous triumvirate. The Sixties also mean protest, the "youth culture," and a new permissiveness together with a new affluence: Dionysus with a bank balance and a cause. For all its garishness, however, the spirit of the Sixties tends to live on and to reveal itself most clearly in a negative not a positive sense: not in what it champions so much as in what it undermines, what it corrodes. In many respects, the Sixties really did amount to a *counter*-culture: a repudiation, an inversion of the Fifties—another period that lives on as a provocation. As we approach the end of the century and a new millennium, the question of what the Sixties wrought is far from settled. Indeed, it has lately assumed a new urgency as it becomes ever clearer that American culture is deeply riven along fault lines first defined by the reverberations of that long, percussive decade.

In his huge compendium on the Sixties,[1] the British social historian Arthur Marwick offers a kind of international sourcebook of exemplary texts, trends, and events from about 1958 through about 1974—his definition of the "long decade" that constituted the Sixties. It is an odd book. There is nearly as much about the evolution of English laws regulating the sale of alcoholic beverages as there is about the Beatles and rock music. The social-science apparatus is wheeled on early and often. The reader encounters sixteen "Characteristics of a Unique Era" ("the formation of new subcultures and movements," "upheavals in

1 *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c.1958–c.1974*, by Arthur Marwick; Oxford University Press, 903 pages, $39.95.

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race, class, and family relationships," etc.) as well as numerous statistical summaries and charts: there is, for example, a chart indicating the percentage of Italian families who owned television sets, refrigerators, and washing machines in 1965 as compared with 1975 (more later than earlier) and a chart comparing the relative popularity in France of watching television and going out in the evening in 1967 and 1973 (ditto). Eight-hundred pages of such stuff are reinforced by one-hundred pages of notes and index.

Mr. Marwick makes a great show of being the careful, "scientific" historian, concerned with sources and evidence, not "metaphysical" theories. He begins with a good deal of methodological throat-clearing: just what counts as an historical period? What really constitutes historical influence?—that sort of thing. This is harmless enough, no doubt. But one might have had more faith in Mr. Marwick's scientific aptitude had the left-wing journalist Paul Berman not appeared as Professor Paul Bearman on page four of *The Sixties*, endowed not only with a new name and a professorship but also with "a strongly hostile view of the radicals of the sixties." Hostile? "We ourselves," Mr. Berman wrote in *A Tale of Two Utopias*, the book to which Mr. Marwick refers in his notes, "stood at the heart of a new society . . . of spiritual grandeur. . . . Something soulful. A moral advance. And in the glow of the very grand and utopian idea, a thousand disparate events from around the world—the student uprisings, the hippie experiments, the religious transformations," &c. Not exactly everyone's idea of hostile.

In many ways, what Mr. Marwick has produced is less a book than a sociologico-historical grab-bag. Nevertheless, *The Sixties* offers both an argument and a mood. The mood is captured by the montages Mr. Marwick offers of the Fifties and the Sixties in his opening pages. It is not all that different from the mood evoked by Mr. Berman. The Sixties, Mr. Marwick writes, prominently featured

> black civil rights; youth culture and trend-setting by young people; idealism, protest, and rebellion; the triumph of popular music based on Afro-American models and the emergence of this music as a universal language; . . . the search for inspiration in the religions of the Orient; massive changes in personal relationships and sexual behaviour; a general audacity and frankness in books and in the media, and in ordinary behaviour; gay liberation; the emergence of "the underground" and the "counterculture"; optimism and genuine faith in the dawning of a better world.

All of which is to be contrasted with the Fifties, a dark, uncreative time whose "key features" include

> rigid social hierarchy; subordination of women to men and children to parents; repressed attitudes to sex; racism; unquestioning respect for authority in the family, education, government, the law, and religion, and for the nation-state, the national flag, the national anthem; Cold War hysteria; a strict formalism in language, etiquette, and dress codes; a dull and cliché-ridden popular culture, most obviously in popular music, with its boring big bands and banal ballads.

Mr. Marwick is quick to add that "of course" a conservative would regard the Fifties quite differently. And he admits along the way that much of what was done in the name of the Sixties "was downright stupid" (the violence, the "mindless" drug-use). But in mood, *The Sixties* adheres closely to the standard left-wing account: Sixties good, Fifties bad. Toward the end of the book, in a few sentences remarkable as much for their baldness as for their naïveté, Mr. Marwick sums up his attitude:

> Life became more various and enjoyable. With less rigid conceptions of marriage and new opportunities for divorce, with changing attitudes to fashion and to education, with the abandonment of comfortable fictions about the nature of beauty and the arrival of informal, body-hugging clothing, there was a heal-

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> thier openness to ordinary living, less need for lies. . . . Gone was the stuffy conservatism of previous decades, while the radical, divisive, philistine conservatism of Reagan and Thatcher was yet to come.

It is an excellent thing that Mr. Marwick early on warned us that "It is very important not to get into the position of idealizing, reifying, or anthropomorphizing periods or decades, attributing personalities to them, singling out 'good' decades from 'bad' decades." The unsuspecting reader must be grateful for that warning: otherwise he might think Mr. Marwick was doing just that.

There is, however, another side to *The Sixties*. If in many respects it embodies the established liberal clichés about the delights of the Age of Aquarius and the depredations of the years before and after, it also challenges at least two important elements of the received story. For one thing, Mr. Marwick has no patience with what he calls the Great Marxisant Fallacy. He describes this as "the belief that the society we inhabit is the bad bourgeois society, but that, fortunately, this society is in a state of crisis, so that the good society which lies just around the corner can be easily attained if only we work systematically to destroy the language, the values, the culture, the ideology of bourgeois society."

As Mr. Marwick notes, "Practically all the activists, student protesters, hippies, yippies, Situationists, advocates of psychedelic liberation, participants in be-ins and rock festivals, proponents of free love, members of the underground, and advocates of Black Power, women's liberation, and gay liberation believed that by engaging in struggles, giving witness, or simply doing their own thing they were contributing to the final collapse of the bad bourgeois society." Or so they said. Revolution in *this* sense was never more than a pipe dream—partly because, as Mr. Marwick notes, modern liberal societies are not the monolithic entities that the radicals and would-be radicals pretended they were. Liberal society—it is part of its genius—tends to absorb opposition instead of rejecting it outright. This does not mean that the cultural revolution did not happen, only that in the end it succeeded by insinuation rather than insurrection. As Mr. Marwick puts it, "The various counter-cultural movements and subcultures, being ineluctably implicated in and interrelated with mainstream society" did not so much confront that society as they "*permeated* and *transformed* it." Exactly.

And this brings us to Mr. Marwick's second challenge. The counterculture of the Sixties is often described as idealistic, utopian, and anti- or non-materialistic. Doubtless there were utopian and idealistic elements. Yet in retrospect we can see that most were so tightly interwoven with naïveté and simple hedonism that neither "utopian" nor "idealistic" seems quite the *mot juste*. And although there was a great deal of rhetoric about the evils of materialism, it is now clear that there had hitherto never been a generation so blissfully immersed in consumerism. The 1980s and 1990s may have perfected the genre. But it was the counterculture of the Sixties—supported by the unprecedented abundance the mainstream economy provided—that succeeded in first spreading the gospel. As Mr. Marwick notes, "most of the movements, subcultures, and new institutions which are at the heart of sixties change were thoroughly imbued with the entrepreneurial, profit-making ethic." All those boutiques, experimental theaters, art galleries, discothèques, nightclubs, light shows, head shops, pornographic outlets, and underground films may have challenged the morals, manners, and standards of taste and accomplishment of bourgeois capitalist society. But they did so while profiting generously from its largesse.

Mr. Marwick is quite happy about all this. In his view, the international movement that "permeated" and "transformed" society constituted a "mini-Renaissance," with the Beatles, miniskirts, and the art of Andy Warhol having contributed "their mite to

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the people's liberation." Everywhere, people were richer, "franker" (a favorite commendation), and more intent upon pursuing pleasure:

> All the statistical evidence suggests that permissive attitudes and permissive behaviour continued to spread at accelerating rates, with only the utterly unforeseen occurrence of AIDS to bring any kind of caution; single-parent families proliferated, the terms "husband" and "wife" became almost quaint, giving place to "lover" and "partner." . . . The appearance, also, of moralistic crusades simply testifies to the strength of the by now well-established behaviour patterns which the crusades, vainly, hoped to eliminate. The cultural revolution, in short, had continuous, uninterrupted, and lasting consequences.

Of course, Mr. Marwick is right. The only question is whether we are justified in taking so cheery a view of the results. Again, Mr. Marwick sounds various cautionary notes; he is disturbed by the phenomenon of political correctness; he notes that the Sixties brought various undesirable excesses. But overall he is a cheerleader for the "multicultural societies" that "exhibit to the full the vibrancy and creative potential which first bloomed in the sixties."

Mr. Marwick's basic mistake is believing that more is necessarily better. Sometimes more is only more. You cannot step a foot into the literature about the 1960s without encountering the phrase "creative potential" and being told *ad nauseam* that not only was the decade "idealistic," it was also terrifically "creative," especially in comparison to the 1950s. In fact, the "idealism" of the 1960s was nine-parts self-infatuation and its creativity was seldom more than adolescent flurry. What Allan Bloom said in comparing American universities in the 1950s to those of the 1960s can easily be generalized to apply to the culture as a whole: "The fifties," Bloom wrote, "were one of the great periods of the American university." They had recently benefitted from an enlivening infusion of European talent and "were steeped in the general vision of humane education inspired by Kant and Goethe." The Sixties, by contrast, "were the period of dogmatic answers and trivial tracts. Not a single book of lasting importance was produced in or around the movement. It was all Norman O. Brown and Charles Reich. This was when the real conformism hit the universities, when opinions about everything from God to the movies became absolutely predictable." Notwithstanding Mr. Marwick's contemptuous remark about the music of the "boring big bands," this was true in virtually every department of intellectual and cultural life. The Sixties saw a tremendous amount of activity but precious little real accomplishment.

They did, however, see an astonishing explosion of material prosperity. Mr. Marwick alludes regularly to that fact, he pets and caresses it, he produces it whenever he attempts to justify his claims on behalf of the achievements of the period. To be sure, material prosperity is a nice thing, a very nice thing. But it does not guarantee cultural health or moral vigor. The culture of the 1990s has served as a vivid reminder of this home truth. We—the industrialized, technologized world—have never been richer. And yet to an extraordinary extent we in the West continue to inhabit a moral and cultural universe shaped by the hedonistic imperatives and radical ideals of the Sixties. Culturally, morally the world we inhabit is is increasingly a trash world: addicted to sensation, besieged everywhere by the cacophonous, mind-numbing din of rock music, saturated with pornography, in thrall to the lowest common denominator wherever questions of taste, manners, or intellectual delicacy are concerned. Mr. Marwick was right: "The cultural revolution, in short, had continuous, uninterrupted, and lasting consequences."

It is hardly surprising that conservatives have traditionally been highly critical of that revolution. Its ethic of self-gratification stood in stark opposition to the moral, intellectual, and political fabric of our culture.

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The wrinkle was abundance. For if the Sixties were an assault on the moral substance of traditional culture, they nonetheless abetted the capitalist culture of accumulation. Yes, there are exceptions, but they are unimportant to the overall pciture. Indeed, it happened that the cultural revolution was most damaging precisely where, in material terms, it was most successful. This put many conservatives in an awkward position. For conservatives have long understood that free markets and political liberty go together. What if it turned out that free markets plus the cultural revolution of the Sixties added up to moral and intellectual poverty? This unhappy thought has lately been the subject of much discussion and disagreement. Among those identified as conservatives, the two most popular responses at the moment seem to be retreat and denial. Both are mistaken.

Probably the most vivid example of the counsel of retreat is the now-notorious open letter written by the conservative activist Paul Weyrich to his friends and supporters. Dated February 16, 1999, this poignant, eighteen-hundred word document is clearly the product of profound disillusionment bordering on despair. Over the last few decades, Mr. Weyrich has done an enormous amount to promote the conservative agenda. He has been instrumental in helping many conservative candidates get elected. It was he who popularized the phrase "moral majority." And yet the impressive political victories he helped to win have clearly not translated into moral or cultural victories. If anything, the culture today is in worse shape than in 1980 when Ronald Reagan was elected: "our culture," Mr. Weyrich argues, "has decayed into something approaching barbarism." The reason? "Politics itself has failed. And politics has failed because of the collapse of the culture. The culture we are living in becomes an ever-wider sewer. In truth, I think we are caught up in a cultural collapse of historic proportions, a collapse so great that it simply overwhelms politics."

Mr. Weyrich began with a faith in the moral wisdom of the majority of American people. That faith has been broken.

> Let me be perfectly frank about it. If there really were a moral majority out there, Bill Clinton would have been driven out of office months ago. It is not only the lack of political will on the part of Republicans, although that is part of the problem. More powerful is the fact that what Americans would have found absolutely intolerable only a few years ago, a majority now not only tolerates but celebrates. Americans have adopted, in large measure, the MTV culture that we so valiantly opposed just a few years ago, and it has permeated the thinking of all but those who have separated themselves from the contemporary culture.

Mr. Weyrich may overstate his case. The MTV culture that he rightly deplores may not have permeated the thinking of quite "all" who have failed to exempt themselves from contemporary culture. And it should be noted that he issues various qualifications and expressions of tentativeness ("I don't have all the answers or even all the questions"). But by and large I think it must be admitted that his unhappy diagnosis is right. At the deepest level—at the level of the culture's taken-for-granted feelings and assumptions about what matters—the hedonistic, self-infatuated ethos of cultural revolution has triumphed to an extent unimaginable when it began.

What is the appropriate response? Mr. Weyrich's "frankly rather radical" proposal is what we might call the survivalist option: opt out, take to the hills. "What seems to me a legitimate strategy," he writes, "is to look at ways to separate ourselves from the institutions that have been captured by the ideology of Political Correctness, or by other enemies of our traditional culture." Some of Mr. Weyrich's suggestions are more plausible than others. Homeschooling, for example, has proven to be an attractive alternative for many families around the country who are appalled by the extent to which both public and private schools have been dumbed-down and have been

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captured by the ideology of political correctness. But what about his praise for those "setting up private courts, where they can hope to find justice instead of ideology and greed"? Do we really want to encourage efforts to establish a "private" judiciary?

In the last year or so, certain liberals have adopted the strategy of attacking conservatives for aping the radical tactics and anti-Americanism of the 1960s. Although the attack is often ludicrously wide of the mark, it has been enormously popular. Liberals understandably enjoy beating conservatives with the stick that only yesterday was wielded so effectively against them. Regrettably, Mr. Weyrich has given his enemies plenty of ammunition for such attacks. Rhetorically and substantively, the most ill-judged part of his letter comes in the peroration when he advocates adopting a "modified version" of the radical slogan "turn on, tune in, drop out." It doesn't matter that Mr. Weyrich wants us to turn *off* our television sets rather than turn on with drugs, or that he advises us to "tune out" the ambient noise of cultural degradation. What catches everyone's attention is his endorsement in any form of Timothy Leary's infamous slogan and his final plea that we "drop out of this culture."

As could have been predicted, Mr. Weyrich's letter created a journalistic firestorm. Liberals savored the evidence of capitulation it seemed to suggest; conservatives for the most part shrank back in appalled silence from the spectacle of political suicide. For his part, Mr. Weyrich later declared that "we're not surrendering—we're opening a different front." It remains to be seen how effective his protestation will be.

Even if one strenuously disagrees with Mr. Weyrich's prescriptions, his seriousness and the pathos of his response make his letter a moving document. Here is a man who has fought long and hard for values he believes in deeply. He may be mistaken; he is not supercilious. I wish I could say the same about the conservatives who have adopted the strategy of denial. If Mr. Weyrich errs on the side of petulance—threatening to go home and take his marbles with him if the game is not played his way—the happy conservatives neither see nor hear nor speak any evil so long as there is a game going and they are allowed to play. Looking around at our astonishing prosperity, they respond (in answer to Bob Dole's plaintive question) "Who needs outrage? We're doing fine, thanks."

The latest salvo from the camp of contentment is "Good & Plenty: Morality in an Age of Prosperity," the cover story for the February 1 issue of *The Weekly Standard*. It is an extraordinary performance. Written by David Brooks, a senior editor at the *Standard*, "Good & Plenty" is an unashamed paean to philistinism. It seems entirely appropriate that its title recalls a popular brand of candy. Mr. Brooks has nothing but sweet things to say about our cultural situation. He opens his essay by telling us about a trip he made to a small town in northeast Connecticut. "I asked some of the older residents whether the cultural upheavals of the 1960s had affected the town much. They didn't know what I was talking about. They remember the sixties as a golden age when jobs were plentiful and the factories were buzzing." Doubtless they did. And so?

One of Mr. Brooks's main points is that "we shouldn't leap to conclusions about the supposed degradation of our culture." That little town he visited was up in arms about a porn shop that had opened down the street. But the town's newfound prosperity came largely from a local gambling casino: so they are tough on smut but welcome gambling. According to Mr. Brooks, the situation in our culture is like a mixed day in the stock market: some are up, some are down. It is "hard to tell whether the aggregate effect is positive or negative." Besides, we shouldn't ignore "all the social indicators that are moving in the right direction: abortion rates are declining, crime is down, teenage sexual activity is down, divorce rates are dropping."

Possibly. But as the historian Gertrude Himmelfarb pointed out recently in "The

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Panglosses of the Right Are Wrong" (*The Wall Street Journal*, February 4),

> For almost every favorable statistic, an ornery conservative can cite an unfavorable one. He can even go beyond the statistics to point to the sorry state of the culture: the loss of parental authority and of discipline in the schools, the violence and vulgarity of television, the obscenity and sadism of rap music, the exhibitionism and narcissism of talk-shows, the pornography and sexual perversions on the Internet, the binge-drinking and "hooking up" on college campuses.

And so on. If none of that has made much of an impression on Mr. Brooks, it is because he wants to scrap all such moral considerations anyway and replace them with pragmatic, "utilitarian" tests. He notes with approval the extent to which society has recast moral—his word is "moralistic"—language in terms of health and safety. Today, he writes, "we regulate behavior and control carnal desires with health codes instead of moral codes. Today in mainstream society, people seldom object to others' taking the Lord's name in vain—but watch out if they see a pregnant woman smoking or drinking." Note the use of "mainstream"—we reasonable people, you understand, do not worry about morals per se: that's for those poor fanatics who still get riled about something as outmoded as blasphemy. We enlightened pragmatists are beyond all that.

Mr. Brooks acknowledges that many people might consider "Morality as mere healthism . . . meager, superficial." But really, he says, in these "happy, prosperous times" "people"—i.e., people like Mr. Brooks—have decided that they "want a lower-case morality that will not arouse passions or upset the applecart." So what if we have a moral pygmy in the White House? Those good folks from Connecticut agreed that "personal behavior has no connection with public performance." What about the continuing depredations of the culture revolution? "No cause for alarm," Mr. Brooks says: "the counterculture has nothing to do" with contemporary life in America. The counterculture of the 1960s, he assures us, was "utopian" whereas "Today's moral attitudes are anti-utopian. They are utilitarian. They are modest. They are, in fact, the values of the class the counterculture hated most. They are the values of the bourgeoisie." The nineteenth century essayist Walter Bagehot famously said that "the essence of civilization . . . is dullness." How surprised he would have been to find himself taken so literally.

A lot of nasty things have been said about the bourgeoisie over the years. But few people can hold that class in deeper contempt than does Mr. Brooks, for all his praise. According to him, the bourgeois doesn't want to bother with "grand abstractions," he is "never heroic" and "has no grandeur," he "never seem[s] to look up from quotidian concerns to grapple with great truths or profound moral issues." At most this modern Polonius is "modest, useful, and reliable." If this is "utilitarian," no wonder Russell Kirk described utilitarianism as "a philosophy of death." Mr. Brooks wants us to celebrate this stunted caricature because, after all, conservatives have always championed the bourgeoisie. But what conservatives have traditionally championed were bourgeois *values* not bourgeois vices. And those values were rooted deeply in a God-fearing Protestant ethic that emphasized church, community, family, and moral honor. The bourgeois ethic is not a form of Romanticism, true enough; but neither is it the vacuous, feel-good, "I've-got-mine" philosophy Mr. Brooks apparently wants us to embrace. Irving Kristol once wrote that "if you believe that a comfortable life is not necessarily the same thing as a good life, or even a meaningful life, then it will occur to you that efficiency is a means, not an end in itself." Perhaps Mr. Brooks would scoff at such distinctions, branding them merely "grand," "abstract," or "heroic." If so, what he espouses is not conservatism but a cheerful, buttoned-down version of the moral vacancy that Mr. Weyrich rightly laments.

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Thomas Mann in English

by Martin Greenberg

Time runs, the century winds to its close, and the great narrative works of the European imagination it gave birth to—the great works of Proust, Mann, Kafka—which one grew up with, and grew up on, in the familiar language of their first translations have now been appearing in new English dress. In Proust's case the dress is only partly new. Scott Moncrieff's celebrated translation of *Remembrance of Things Past* was revised, not redone, by Terence Kilmartin, who approached his task with uncommon wisdom and accomplished it with fine literary judgment.

> The need to revise the existing translation in the light of the Pléiade edition . . . also provided an opportunity of correcting mistakes and misinterpretations in Scott Moncrieff's version. Translation, almost by definition, is imperfect . . . I have refrained from officious tinkering for its own sake, but a translator's loyalty is to the original author, and in trying to be faithful to Proust's meaning and tone of voice I have been obliged, here and there, to make extensive alterations.

Scott Moncrieff's translation of Proust was a labor of love. When he translated Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir*, for all that he admired that marvelous writer, he lacked feeling, affinity for the novel's matter-of-fact, abrupt style; his translation was superseded long ago by plainer versions such as M. R. B. Shaw's. Edwin Muir's translations (with Willa Muir) of Kafka, bread-and-butter work as well as a labor of love, were long admired for their easy English, which suited Kafka's elegant German. But in time there was the inevitable criticism of inaccuracies, and with the correction of the German texts on the basis of the original manuscripts, retranslation was surely called for. In Britain the Kafka scholar Malcolm Pasley retranslated many of the stories, J. A. Underwood *The Castle*; in the U.S. Mark Harman *The Castle* and Breon Mitchell *The Trial*.

Pasley's translations are as much a revision of the Muirs' fine work as a new translation, which regrettably is not acknowledged in the two Penguin volumes. I rejoiced to read in Eric Ormsby's superior essay "Franz Kafka and the Trip to Spindelmühle" (*The New Criterion*, November 1998) his castigation of Harman's "shameless introduction," which dares to patronize the Muirs (who run rings around him as writers) and which is full of vulgar self-praise. Harman is abetted in this by his publisher Schocken, which ought to have shown a decent respect for the invaluable work the Muirs did for Kafka and for Schocken books over many years. PEN, now little more than a publicity outfit, pitched in too with one of its "cultural events," lending its voice to the appreciation of the worse and the depreciation of the better.

About Helen Lowe-Porter's translations of Thomas Mann the story is rather different. Her efforts with Mann's earlier

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works were much praised when they were first published in the Twenties and Thirties. As Mann's novels got to be more difficult (and more difficult for the translator) she began to catch it from reviewers. But Mann's books sold and Knopf held fast to her to the end. After World War II, criticism of the translations got mixed up with criticism of Mann himself, or so he thought: not only the translations, but the works too were found to be heavy, elaborate, even pompous, and Mann's reputation (except for *Buddenbrooks* and *Death in Venice*) declined. However, just as Daunty, Gouty, and Shopkeeper, as Joyce with schoolboy humor nicknamed them to lighten their trinitarian solemnity (not out of mockery but respect, as perhaps it needs to be said today), still occupy the thrones of traditional European literature, though English speakers hardly read the second, so Mann is still numbered with Proust, Joyce, and, latest crowned, Kafka as the kings of twentieth-century European fiction.

From the first Mann was never really content with Mrs. Lowe-Porter; he put up with her. It is of course true that no translator would ever have satisfied Mann, ever satisfies any serious writer dismayed to see the less finely drawn face his work wears in the roughcast of an alien language, though there are degrees of roughness. Mann, like so many when it comes to their own work, believed a translation should be "as literal as the foreign language will allow." Lowe-Porter, however, believed in "the spirit first and the letter so far as might be." So she put it in her translator's note to *Buddenbrooks*. She felt "his books would not have made money in English translation if they had not—out of my profound respect for the English tongue—been 'easily readable.' I will not claim more for them than that, because it is enough." And so they were—readable, and read with pleasure by a general public for decades. In a dialogue on *The Magic Mountain* in Erich Heller's *Thomas Mann: The Ironic German*, Q remarks that he "remembers a passage" which "even in translation" struck him by "its lyrical beauty"—it was Hans Castorp's recollection of an evening boat ride on a lake in Holstein, the moon rising in the magical, night-shrouded, misty east, broad day still holding in the sober, glassy light of the west.

Two generations have passed since then and Mann has been taken into the care of the academy. The appearance of a new translation of *Buddenbrooks* by John E. Woods, followed since by his retranslations of *The Magic Mountain* and *Doctor Faustus*,[1] led not long after to a harsh attack on Mann's translators, and especially on the deceased Lowe-Porter, by two British professors of German in the *Times Literary Supplement* of October 13, 1995. Michael Beddow wrote in a review of Woods's translation that the "chief obstacle to proper appreciation of Thomas Mann in Anglo-Saxony [is] the poor quality of nearly all the published translations," criticizing Lowe-Porter for her "inaccuracies, omissions and general stylistic helplessness." The main attack followed on the next page, an entire article by Timothy Buck beginning with an almost personal expression of contempt for Mrs. Lowe-Porter, whom he called "a small-town Pennsylvanian with large literary ambitions"—the latter phrase referring to her view of translation as "creative authorship," to the very free hand, for Buck license, with which she rendered Mann's texts. His article offered a sampling of her delinquencies, classified as: getting German words and phrases wrong; textual omissions; violations of the syntax of the original; and inexact renderings that "call in question the very use of the word 'translation.'"

Now Lowe-Porter's translations are indeed full of lexical errors, some of them surprising because so elementary: *kurzweilig* (entertaining, diverting) translated as "brief"; *ihre Tränen waren versiegt* (her tears had dried), "her tears were conquered."

1 *Buddenbrooks* (Alfred A. Knopf 1993, Everyman edition 1994); *The Magic Mountain* (Alfred A. Knopf 1995); *Doctor Faustus* (Alfred A. Knopf 1998).

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These seem to be the errors of someone whose experience of German has been with books more than life and who misunderstands familiar idiomatic language. Translations always contain errors, in Lowe-Porter's case too many. Against this, one should remember how much, in the thousands of pages she translated, she got right.

Her textual omissions and condensations too are so frequent as to be a regular practice. She often deals summarily with a complex passage which might very well have been worked out fully in English. There is one horrendous example of a dropped sentence, a short and simple one, at the very climax of *Death in Venice*. (Surely it was inadvertent. But why was it never corrected?) However, there is something to be said for as well as against the way she shortens the text. Mann is the opposite of laconic, he pours the words out, like Goethe, in a great flow, observes and describes in great detail, says the same thing one way and then another. This is an important element in his power, weight. But transferred faithfully (dutifully) into English, there is a danger of the language losing pace, crowding up and becoming a lot of words. As for her violation of Mann's syntax: this charge seems mostly pedantry to me. German can pack qualifying phrases and clauses between the subject and the verb in a way that English may be made to follow but doesn't like. The danger of following Mann's word order too closely is tangled, inept sentences—translationese.

Buck's last charge concerns Lowe-Porter's imprecision, by which he means her free way with the text. His example concerns the point in *Death in Venice* when Aschenbach encounters Tadzio on the way to the beach and the thought suggests itself: why not simply go up to the youth and speak to him in the ordinary, unfraught way, in the friendly, familiar way people use at resorts, and so commence a pleasant, less agitated seaside acquaintance? But his heart hammers in his breast when he hurries to overtake him, his breath comes short and his courage deserts him. Buck offers the following translation of the narrator's comment on Aschenbach's failure as being precise and true in the way Lowe-Porter's isn't:

> This step he had failed to take could very possibly have led to . . . a salutary disenchantment (*heilsamer Ernüchterung*). But now it seemed to be the case that the aging man did not wish to be disenchanted, that the intoxication was too precious to him.

What strikes me first of all is that "salutary disenchantment" is an ill phrase, a vile phrase; it is also a misleading one. Aschenbach has been captivated by Tadzio's beauty and grace, but his appreciation and delight aren't the trouble; they are the acknowledged response to beauty, the senses' way, their only way, Aschenbach muses Socratically a little later, to the spirit. The trouble is that aesthetic delight is urging him, step by step, into a passion for the beautiful boy, the way of beauty leading not to the spirit but to moral anarchy and death. The result the step he failed to take might have had at this stage in his infatuation was *his coming to his senses*, his recovering from the drunken state the next sentence speaks about, recovering control over unhealthy impulses his conscience can't approve, which later in the story make a rouged clown of the dignified, respectable writer. The word *Ernüchterung* (from *nüchtern*, sober) here doesn't suggest his being under a kind of spell, a Keatsian enchantment—that would be too nice by far for a story about sordid desires and moral abjectness. Rather it suggests what Aschenbach's Protestant conscience is saying at this point, that his feverish emotions might have found a corrective in a more or less ordinary relationship with Tadzio, which would have imposed a calming restraint on his wild and disorderly longings. (But the story's final note is not one of abasement and humiliation but of true pathos, when, in Lowe-Poter's translation, "the pale and lovely Summoner" beckons him on "into an immensity of richest expectation.")

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Lowe-Porter's English isn't wooden like Buck's;

> This step he delayed to take might have led to . . . a sane recovery from his folly. But the truth may have been that the aging man did not want to be cured, that his illusion was too dear to him.

And "recovery from his folly" might just pass for *Ernüchterung*—but not with "sane" before it; it is not Aschenbach's sanity that is in question. And to apply the word "illusion" (for *Rausch*, drunkenness) to a middle-aged man's sexual passion for a boy—the translator is averting her eyes from the pedophilia that is a central element of the story. The narrator's language is formal, dignified, discreet, in contrast with the indiscreet story it is telling. But Lowe-Porter's "illusion" isn't discreet, it bowdlerizes, falsifies. Each translator, in his or her different way, makes things too nice. True, Lowe-Porter fails with the passage but so does her critic. Expertise extends only so far; beyond it lie the debatable complexities of literary translation, to which Buck seems blind.

Buck's article provoked a reply, from Lawrence Venuti, an American translator (from the Italian) and the author of a book on translation, that appeared in the letters section of the *Times Literary Supplement* of November 24, 1995. His somewhat muddled letter defended Lowe-Porter and Woods on the grounds of the conditions under which translators work: time, place, and audience. Thus, her evasive rendering just quoted was called a "reinterpretation . . . according to [the] domestic values [of] an American audience in the 1930s"—this apparently meaning that pedophilia however delicately suggested was a taboo subject in the U.S. of those years, requiring "reinterpretation." Lowe-Porter and Woods, having a general public in mind, "took a belletristic approach," which is easygoing about precision, whereas "contemporary academic canons" require "extreme precision." Little was said about literary quality, also apparently a relative matter, subject to changing judgments. What the letter seemed at bottom to complain about, with justice, was the superior attitude of "academic specialists" on their professorial high horse finding fault with the hard work of translators toiling down below in the salt mines of an undervalued branch of literature.

Venuti was answered not by Buck but by David Luke (December 8, 1995), also a professor of German and a translator of many works—an academic, that is, with nevertheless a lot of experience in the salt mines. His self-described "rude" reply, brushing aside Venuti's defense of Lowe-Porter and Woods, accused him of "willfully miss[ing] the main point" of Buck's piece, which was that neither translator knew "enough German to cope with Thomas Mann." He cited more errors by Lowe-Porter, and, for Woods, instanced a passage near the end of *Buddenbrooks* (in which Hanno is dying of typhoid fever) that gets things turned the wrong way round by speaking of life as a place of "cooling shade and peace" (no Mannian sentiment, that) when it is death to which these words apply. Yes, concluded Luke, call us academic specialists; would we rather be bunglers? Our specialized knowledge is needed for pointing out the mistakes which make the "circulation of debased versions of the great German writers of this century a continuing scandal."

Venuti's reply to Luke (December 22, 1995) accused him of expecting, as "foreign-language academics" do, that a translation should be "inscribed (sic) with the specialist's interpretation of the foreign text." He conceded Woods had mistranslated the passage cited by Luke, but then claimed that the mistake "worked in English" (more "reinterpretation"). Luke retorted, even more rudely, by giving Venuti a lesson in German grammar and advising him "to stick to his last," Italian, an "easier language."

Both Beddow and Buck held up their colleague Luke's translation of *Death in Venice and Other Stories* (1988) as a model—"a

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model translation," wrote Buck, "faithful to the original, yet fluent." Now the burden of the charge against Lowe-Porter is her inaccuracies; these gave readers a false, a "debased" Mann. The literary quality of her work presumably needed no discussion, literary inferiority following from linguistic. Luke in his introduction to his translation says this explicitly: her "more imponderable defects of style or taste . . . may be inferred *a fortiori* from the frequency of the cruder kind of error." May they, though? Judgments of style may be more arguable, but may they be inferred in this way? This understanding of translation is absurdly schoolmasterish. Think of North's Plutarch, Florio's Montaigne. Think how Cervantes in English declined in vivacity as he gained in accuracy, from Motteux and Smollett to Cohen and Putnam, till we got a vigorous translation again, a translation that is a pleasure to read, from Burton Raffel (Norton, 1995). The literary quality of a translation is a primary thing, not to be inferred from something else. And quality is more than a matter of fluency; there is more than enough bad fluent writing, especially in England.

Let me compare Lowe-Porter's writing with Luke's writing in the case of their translations of *Death in Venice*. I take as an example the striking passage that follows Aschenbach's aborted effort to leave Venice, whose spreading cholera the authorities are criminally concealing. He returns to glimpse from the window of his room, with a soul divided between rapture and painful self-recognition, the true cause of his coming back, Tadzio, on the beach. Letting his arms hang slack, he who had renounced all sympathy with the abyss, who had passed through knowledge which sophisticates understanding and dissolves the will, to arrive in his maturity at a new-old simplicity of decisiveness and moral stringency—he it is who abandons himself to pagan love, Venetian lies, and deadly plague. With this triumph of the Dionysian, the weather changes to classical and the style changes to classical, a parody of the classical (which is not after all far removed from Mann's own style, inclined to the Olympian—but that too is parody). Lowe-Porter writes:

> Now daily the naked god with cheeks aflame drove his four fire-breathing steeds through heaven's spaces; and with him streamed the strong east wind that fluttered his yellow locks. A sheen, like white satin, lay over all the idly rolling sea's expanse. The sand was burning hot. Awnings of rust-colored canvas were spanned before the bathing-huts, under the ether's quivering silver-blue; one spent the morning within the small, sharp square of shadow they purveyed. But evening too was rarely lovely: balsamic with the breath of flowers and shrubs from the near-by park, while overhead the constellations circled in their spheres, and the murmuring of the night-girted sea swelled softly up and whispered to the soul. Such nights as these contained the joyful promise of a sunlit morrow, brim-full of sweetly ordered idleness, studded thick with countless precious possibilities.

This has the cadence, the lyrical lift, the forward movement of the original, without stumbles or hesitations, from the beginning of the paragraph to its end. Or almost to its end: it lurches in the last two clauses where the German is dense and abstract (*von leichtgeordneter Musse und geschmückt mit zahllosen, dicht beieinanderliegenden Möglichkeiten lieblichen Zufalls*). The diction has the proper elevation (in one case, "purveyed," perhaps not the right kind). The language has distinction; it is not merely translated, it is written. Here is Luke's version:

> Now day after day, the god with the burning cheeks soared naked, driving his four fire-breathing steeds through the spaces of heaven, and now, too, his yellow-gold locks fluttered wide in the out-storming east wind. Silk-white radiance gleamed on the slow-swelling deep's vast waters. The sand glowed. Under the silvery quivering blue of the ether, rust-colored awnings were spread out in front of the beach cabins, and one spent the morning hours on

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> the sharply defined patch of shade they provided. But exquisite, too, was the evening, when the plants in the park gave off a balmy fragrance, and the stars on high moved through their dance, and the softly audible murmur of the night-surrounded sea worked its magic on the soul. Such an evening carried with it the promise of a new sunlit day of leisure easily ordered, and adorned with countless close-knit possibilities of charming chance encounter.

Its movement is sluggish because the beat, though correct enough when scanned, is disturbed by clumsy phrasing. "His yellow-gold locks fluttered wide in the out-storming east wind" is verbose, and the unidiomatic "out-storming" brings one up short. "Silvery quivering blue of the ether" is literal and clumsy; it jars. (Lowe-Porter's "ether's quivering silver-blue" runs much easier.) "Softly audible murmur" is gluey, redundant language. "Exquisite too was the evening" is banal ("exquisite" being a word ruined for most purposes. Lowe-Porter's "evening too was rarely lovely" manages with suaveness German that employs a conventional lyrical vocabulary by design.)

All this is poor enough; with Luke's last sentence there is complete collapse. "Leisure easily ordered" isn't English, it's a literal translation of the general phrase, *leicht geordneter Musse*. Lowe-Porter's "sweetly ordered idleness" is English, but at the expense of the meaning. Neither translator brings out the more definite sense, implicit in the German, which English wants (some such phrase as "idleness with its easy, impromptu arrangements"). The last clause of all is a clumsy pile-up of words. "Adorned with countless close-knit possibilities" makes one grimace; literalism, as so often, here verges on the grotesque.

Buck sneered at Lowe-Porter's literary ambition. Any translator worth his salt is moved by such ambition, struggles creatively to make literature out of literature. For all her delinquencies, vagaries, and waywardness, she was a writer, as Luke is not. In a continuation of the exchange of letters described above, two of Lowe-Porter's daughters wrote the TLS (January 19, 1996) conveying the text of a letter their mother wrote to Alfred A. Knopf, Mann's American publisher, in 1943. It talks at some length about the difficulties of translating Mann, whom she so much admired (the work and the man), and sets forth her fuller conception of the translator's task.

> I cannot think a creative artist would be glad to see his true marriage of thought and word turned into something which, however word-accurate, had ceased to be literature at all. . . . And herein lies the Scylla of translators. The Charybdis would be the failure to give a faithful rendering of the sense. It is very hard to avoid them both.

Charybdis gave her trouble, as this perhaps implicitly acknowledges.

The three academicians show no real awareness that translating literature, all the more so great literature, requires something more than word accuracy. They mark Lowe-Porter's and Woods's work as they would a student's bluebook, with an eye only for mistakes; but also with the indignation of official authorities who regard all amateurs of their subject as bungling interlopers.

The last word in the prolonged exchange, as the first, was Buck's (February 16, 1996); he quotes from a letter sent to him by Konrad Kellen, who was Mann's secretary for some years. Kellen wrote that he once asked Mann what he thought of Lowe-Porter's translations and he replied: "'Oh, you know, Mrs. L.P. is such a nice woman and a good friend of mine!' and then, raising his finger and his eyebrows: 'She doesn't know German! (*Deutsch kann sie nicht!*) But not everybody can be expected to!'" This is witty, as Mann often was. But it shows a fundamental misapprehension. She didn't know German—but he didn't know English. He couldn't judge English writing. What a translator needs to know first of all is his own language, have his own command of

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its literary powers. With a less than perfect knowledge of the language they are translating from, but borne up by admiration and the love of literature, such translators have done brilliant work. Another British professor of German, T. J. Reed, a fine scholar of Goethe and Mann, has this to say in the introductory matter he provided to Woods's translation of *Buddenbrooks*. "The greatest part of Mann's fiction was translated into English by Mrs. Helen Lowe-Porter. . . . Despite many errors of detail, the translation remains an heroic piece of work."

Mann's work needs a more correct translation, and time itself in any case is inexorable in its demand for fresh versions. These are now being provided for the novels by John E. Woods. Buck and Luke accused him of incompetence in German, but that is nonsense. Of the ten "more striking errors" the former culled from the first 125 pages of Woods's translation of *Buddenbrooks*, I count only four as true mistakes. When Woods misreads *weiss* (white) as *weit* (wide), that's a slip, not ignorance. Lowe-Porter makes mistakes, Woods makes slips. With very big novels like Mann's, and driven by deadlines as professional translators are (and with no editorial backup from publishers), how should there not be slips and even worse? In Woods's translations of *Buddenbrooks*, *The Magic Mountain*, and *Doctor Faustus* he does what is expected of him: provides a more accurate English text. This means he regularly corrects his predecessor's mistakes (even if making mistakes of his own); is guilty of fewer lexical gaffes (as it seems to me); doesn't omit or condense phrases and sentences (is given instead to clumsy explanatory additions); translates particular terms more exactly; and sticks closer to letter and syntax.

Yet I found myself turning away from Woods, irritated and often bored, to Lowe-Porter. The irritation, regularly provoked, was with his gross insensitivity to what rhetoricians call decorum. "Nope," he has the elder Buddenbrook, a man of the eighteenth century, say, as a translation of the North German dialectical *na, ja!*. Consul Thomas Buddenbrook tells his sister Tony, "You can't get away with that with me." Hans Castorp in *The Magic Mountain*, just arrived at the sanitorium, wonders with the "leery self-consciousness of youth" if there is derision in Dr. Krokowski's affability. At Peeperkorn's party "the guests were horsing around."

Mann's formality of style is not so strict as to forbid colloquialisms, in his own language and his translator's; nevertheless some delicacy is called for. In Woods's *Doctor Faustus* we find the narrator writing that "people flat-out (*schlechterdings*) did not wish to know why Opus 111 has only two movements"; that Kretzschmar's stutter has his "jaw and chin pulsing in sync"; he quotes Leverkühn speaking about "an art that is on a first-name basis with humanity" (*eine Kunst mit der Menschheit auf du und du* [an art in which it and humanity say *du* to one another]). This shows a tin ear. I suspect Woods of thinking he is updating Mann in English by his vulgarisms from "Victorian" to modern. In contemporary illiteracy all formality of language, formality of any kind, is deemed old-fashioned and "old-fashioned" means "Victorian."

When translating a sentence by Mann, or anybody, the translator must always be asking himself what is going on in the paragraph, chapter, and book in which it is contained, on guard against the dulling routine of word-for-word transcription. In the chapter "Research" in *The Magic Mountain*, life's problem child Hans Castorp, instead of boning up on his engineering books, immerses himself in volumes of anatomy, physiology, and botany in pursuit of an answer to the question: What is life? Falling asleep over his books, he rhapsodically dreams he is being embraced by Claudia Chauchat, who appears to him as "the image of life." Woods writes:

> She bent toward him, bent down to him, over him, he sensed her organic aroma, sensed the lace-like pounding of her heart.

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This is a touching-amusing moment as the young engineer's scientific reflections rise (not change) into longing and love. But what in the world does "lace-like pounding" mean? It means nothing, it's a slip. Woods read the German crazily: the word in question, *Spitzenstoss*, signifies something like "peak (rate of) pulsation." *Spitze*, however, means "lace" as well as "peak" and the translator, who must have been dreaming himself, took the winding road to nonsense instead of the straight one before him. But how did the nonsense pass muster on rereading? Didn't Woods reread his manuscript? How did it pass editorial muster? But of course editors and publishers don't read manuscripts any more. (Lowe-Porter gets it wrong too—"mild pulsation"—but not senselessly wrong.)

Now one of the things going on in *The Magic Mountain* is Hans Castorp's instruction in, exploration of, the ambiguous relation between matter and spirit, the scientific and the aesthetic, knowing illness and simple-minded health, the physiological and the affective. In the "Research" chapter, after having studied the sciences of material life, he comes, before falling into his dream, to the following conclusion.

> Out of overcompensation for its own instability, yet governed by its own inherent laws of formation, a bloated concoction of water, protein, salt, and fats—what we call flesh—ran riot, unfolded and took shape, achieving form, ideality, beauty, and yet all the while was the quintessence of sensuality and desire. . . . This was the image of life revealed to the young Hans Castorp.

So when Claudia Chauchat, as a particular image of this life, embraces him in his dream, he is being embraced by a delectable composition of water, protein, salt, and fats. Her lifted arms had disclosed to him the blue branchings of the veins inside the flesh of the inside of her upper arms, naked arms which have long enchanted him. Placing his hands on their surface, he felt the coolness of the grainy skin stretched tight over the triceps. And then (Lowe-Porter writes) "he felt the moist clinging of her kiss"—and then (Woods writes) "he felt the moist suckle of her kiss." Both translators, again, have got it wrong. The German is *die feuchte Ansaugung ihres Kusses*, "the moist aspiration [suction] of her kiss." The story Mann is telling is of love scientific-lyrical: Claudia's aroma is "organic"; her heart beats amorously at its "peak pulsation rate"; a swooning kiss is an "aspiration." Neither translator has lifted his or her head up to consider what is going on in the chapter. Characteristically, Lowe-Porter with utter disregard of the text falls back in her uncertainty on literature (high-toned literature) to describe the kiss; Woods tries to stick to the text but comes up, again crazily, with a nursery word.

Woods is deficient in literary feeling and literary style. In the brilliant, so amusing "Walpurgis Night" chapter of *The Magic Mountain*, in which the novel's "ordinary" hero, emboldened by the occasion's spirit of abandon, dares at last to speak to Claudia Chauchat, the second person singular, a distinction lost to us in English, plays an important part. He says *du* to her, thus declaring himself as a lover. This gives an English translator some trouble. When Hans Castorp passes over into speaking French so as to shake off the constraints and inhibitions imposed by his native tongue, the German original, of course, gives the French as French. But Woods commits the clumsy, gross, the inexcusable blunder of translating the French; he loses half (all!) the wit and charm of the episode, to which the French is indispensable, as well as giving himself the trouble a second time of dealing periphrastically with the second person singular or ignoring it entirely. Lowe-Porter keeps the French and so we are able to feel directly the force of the intimate *tu*.

This is more than a narrow linguistic matter. As equivocal as the novel is, the word of love it speaks is perhaps its least equivocal utterance, and least equivocal in the vision Hans Castorp has when lost in

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the snowstorm on the mountain heights. When I tried to imagine a subtitle for *The Magic Mountain* so as to grasp it as a whole, what came to mind was "The Book of Du." That, of course, is too declarative and too one-sided for the Mannian imagination of the modern world, but it has its justice.

The third novel so far translated by Woods, *Doctor Faustus*, is not without its dimension of *du* too, but a negative *du*, the *du* that the ice-cold genius, the composer Leverkühn, can never say. A deathly work, it seems untranslatable. Nevertheless, we have two translations of it. It isn't only the chapters full of dialect, and the chapters in the sixteenth-century German of the *Faustbuch* and Luther, and the web of allusions to Goethe and Wagner and Nietzsche and I don't know whom else that make the difficulty. Mann's art is very much an art of making, a Daedalian art of intricate construction. When successful, it is a brilliant art. Of the three novels, though all daedal works, *Buddenbrooks* is least a construction, *Doctor Faustus* most. And, as such, with the smallest amount of spontaneity (life) and the maximum of deliberateness (art), translating it is a daunting job—because the more a literary work is *made*, the less separable it is from the medium of its making (in this case, Mann's German). And when a work is almost entirely contrivance, and no blood circulates in its veins, as with *Doctor Faustus*, translation seems sheer impossibility.

Of course there are flashes of life in the novel, the brightest in my estimation being a set-piece, the monologue of the Jewish impresario Saul Fitelberg, who intrudes on Leverkühn's agonized reclusion and tries to tempt him into the world of public performances and fashionable society. He comes in talking away, rattles on with great vivacity and wit, is quick to understand the situation, and departs goodhumoredly sounding as he goes. His wit, though spoken lightly, deprecatingly, is pointed. (A touch of anti-Semitism sharpens the portrait.) When Fitelberg appears, Woods's translation, emerging from a slough of literalism, moves with animation.

There are a number of other set-pieces in the novel, though none so successful. For example, the Devil, the so-important Devil, who is a talker too—his animation is nothing more than words; he is an "ersatz devil," to quote J. P. Stern. With the passage of time he is starting to look silly. German evil represented by nihilistic intellectual discussions, by Leverkühn's contracting syphilis willfully from the "hetaera Esmerelda," by advanced music nihilistically negating Beethoven's Ninth Symphony—with the passage of time, with the accumulated knowledge of the Holocaust, of the Death that was a "Meister aus Deutschland," *Doctor Faustus* itself is looking hollow, unreal.

Consider Dr. phil. Serenus Zeitblom the narrator, also of crucial importance to the novel. A humanist of the North, one who finds the daemonic, not to speak of the diabolical, uncongenial, he is also a German nationalist. Although he has quit his teaching post rather than reconcile himself to "the spirit and claims of our historical development"—that is, to the daemonic-diabolical Hitler regime—nevertheless, as his words say, the Third Reich is historically required and he can't help rejoicing in German victories. In the same way, the humanist is a loyal supporter and chronicler of the possessed Leverkühn, whose daemonic genius makes him uneasy, but the triumphs of whose diabolical music move him to admiration and awe. So he is presented—a hard thing to carry off, one would think. Does Mann succeed?

Here is Zeitblom speaking (that is, writing):

> This . . . morning I read in the paper about the auspicious revival of our submarine war, which within twenty-four hours has claimed as its victims no fewer than twelve ships—including two large passenger liners . . . with five hundred passengers aboard. We owe this success to a new torpedo with fabulous capabilities, the product of a skilled German technology; and I cannot suppress a certain

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> satisfaction at our ever resourceful spirit of invention, at our nation's competence, which despite so many reverses refuses to yield and is still totally at the disposal of the regime that led us into this war and has indeed laid the entire continent at our feet, replacing the intellectual dream of a European Germany with the albeit terrifying, rather flawed, and as the world sees it, so it would seem, quite intolerable reality of German Europe. That involuntary feeling of satisfaction always yields then to the thought that such sporadic triumphs—like these recent sinkings or the commando exploit of kidnapping the fallen Italian dictator (and taken just in itself, it was a splendid coup)—can still serve only to awaken false hopes and prolong a war that . . . can no longer be won. This is also the opinion of Monsignor Hinterpförtner, the head of our theological seminary in Freising . . . —a man who in no way resembles that passionate scholar around whom was centered the student uprising in Munich, which was then quelled in a ghastly bloodbath.

This is cardboard stuff, pure contrivance. The English could stand improvement but the fault lies with the German. Zeitblom the old-fashioned honorable scholar and Teutonic pedant, a man of integrity corrupted to an uncertain degree by a perverted German patriotism—he is utterly unconvincing in spite of all Mann's efforts, because of all Mann's efforts. Zeitblom's moral division between humanist and nationalist is packed mechanically into single sentences. What would be a painful rupture in any man's soul, no matter how little confronted, is here completely anesthetic. The feeling for music, and for the music that plays an important part in the novel, is real. But describing music in words is a virtuoso thing and only contributes to the dominating impression of construction and contrivance. We must be grateful to Mrs. Lowe-Porter and John E. Woods for the long and hard exertions required of them to wrestle *Doctor Faustus* over into English. That their translations make for heavy, awkward reading is not their fault—is not first of all their fault, because *Doctor Faustus* itself, *Doctor Faustus* in the German, is a heavy, awkward work.

Perhaps there is a kind of rule at work in translation, as suggested by the example of *Don Quijote* given above. First translations done enthusiastically out of love have vitality, force. But because they are the first to deal with what is a difficult new thing, they often stumble; or finding the foreign work's strangeness too shocking to the idiomatic expectations of the host language, they sometimes over-English. With the passage of time the foreign work wins acceptance and the professors move in. Scholarship takes over from literary taste and it becomes a chore to read the corrected translations. But finally, it is to be hoped, scholarship and taste unite, as with Burton Raffel's translation of *Don Quijote*, and the pleasure that is the beating heart of literature is recovered.

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"The Aesthetics of Music"

an exchange between
Horace W. Brock & Roger Scruton

Some dozen years ago, I was riveted by a report in the press about the findings of a study that investigated what male Americans enjoy most in their lives. As best as I can recall, the candidates included work, family, sex, and music. The winner, hands down, was music. But why was this the case? What is distinctive about the musical experience? The study in question was predictably silent on these matters, but the English philosopher Roger Scruton is not in his important new work, *The Aesthetics of Music.*[1] This book is aptly described on its cover as "the first comprehensive account of the nature and significance of music from the perspective of modern philosophy, and the only treatment of the subject to be extensively illustrated with musical examples."

But what exactly is the "aesthetics of music" as a field of study? In Scruton's view, it amounts to an investigation of what makes music special as a human endeavor, that is: what are the defining properties that make music *music*? His book makes a significant contribution to our understanding of this question. But surely there is another equally important question lying at the heart of musical aesthetics, one going back to the original insights of Plato and his colleagues: what makes a particular composition especially beautiful? Why at the deepest level is it that people obtain such great pleasure from compositions by Bach or Beethoven, or songs by Bob Dylan, when measured "objectively" on an applause meter? Recall in this regard that the Greeks did not instruct us to understand harmony and rhythm merely as "properties" of music. Rather they spoke of *eurhythmy*, where the prefix *eu-* designates "good" or "successful." Remarkably, Scruton's allegedly comprehensive treatise sheds almost no light on this deeper question.

Why is this the case? Is Scruton simply another modernist who believes that such value-laden normative issues cannot and should not be addressed? Quite the contrary. He argues explicitly that the analysis of values is inextricable from the enterprise of serious musical aesthetics. Rather, the answer may well be found in the type of philosophy upon which Scruton draws: modern Anglo-American analytical philosophy. As will be suggested further on, the level of logic used in this type of philosophy intrinsically limits the ability of philosophers to deal with precisely such questions as "What makes X more beautiful than Y, and why?" The logic is typically verbal (mere "word games," some critics allege), and insufficiently mathematical for serious theory construction.

Interestingly, precisely this deficiency of analytical philosophy revealed itself earlier in this century in the fields of ethics and political theory. Extensive discussion about

1 *The Aesthetics of Music*, by Roger Scruton; Oxford University Press, 550 pages, $39.95.

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the meaning of justice via verbal analyses-of-meaning produced precious little of interest during the first half of the century. Progress started to be made in the 1950s when the Berkeley philosopher John Harsanyi drew upon modern decision theory and social-choice theory and succeeded in axiomatizing Utilitarianism in 1955. This work contributed to Harsanyi's being awarded the 1994 Nobel Prize in economics. A bastardized and problematic version of this early work would later lie at the heart of John Rawls's 1971 *Theory of Justice*, arguably the most celebrated modern work in political theory.

The ecstatic response to this decidedly *non*-"analytical" work suggested to many that analytical philosophy had failed in its most essential task of imparting a superior account of justice and fairness. The paradox here is that, despite its pretensions to analytical rigor, analytical philosophy has proven to be insufficiently analytical to produce robust results. The situation in aesthetics (and not just musical aesthetics) is analogous.

Let us begin, however, by accepting Scruton's restricted conception of musical aesthetics at face value. What does he contribute to the question of what it is that makes music so special? Plenty, and it makes for jolly good if somewhat taxing reading. He succinctly summarizes a good portion of the argument set forth in the first two-thirds of his book on page 344. To paraphrase this useful summary:

1. Music is not "representational" as many forms of the applied and decorative arts are. Specifically, music does not—with rare exceptions—represent particular objects or actions.

2. Nevertheless, music is often very meaningful, in the strong sense that there is something to be understood in it.

3. The act of listening to music is an expression of aesthetic interest, and music is primarily understood through the aesthetic experience of listening to it.

4. Musical truth cannot be decoded in a highly structural manner through any "generative syntax." Scruton contrasts this state of affairs in music with that in linguistics where (some believe) linguistic truth across many languages can be apprehended by applying (in Noam Chomsky's phrase) rules of "transformational grammar." Scruton is very critical of musical "structuralists" such as Leonard Meyer and Heinrich Schenker, and he usefully criticizes not only their particular theories, but also the very aspiration of locating aesthetic truth in the form of "deep structures."

5. The expressive and emotive qualities of music form the most important part of its content.

How successful is Scruton in establishing these points, and how original are they? His most original contribution centers on point three above. He develops a novel account of musical meaning as "the intentional object of an imaginative perception." He writes that

> The correct approach to aesthetic description, I believe, is to distinguish clearly between the intentional object of aesthetic interest, and the material object in which it is located. Aesthetic description is an attempt to characterize the intentional object—that which we see, hear, or understand *in* the work of art. The terms deployed in aesthetic description do not describe the material reality at all, but express, and also recommend, a particular response to it.

In this context, Scruton insists that the truest and possibly the only path to aesthetic understanding lies in the act of listening, and in responding to what we hear in whatever (subjective) way we do.

Scruton's extensive analysis of this concept is convincing—as far as it goes. The problem is that his account does not

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provide a sufficient basis for a comprehensive aesthetics of music. While Scruton's analyses of the other four points are not as striking as his theory of aesthetic description, he admirably succeeds either in usefully rebuking or else in extending the ideas of others in each case. And he does so with originality. Indeed, a pleasant dividend of reading this book is the extent to which it permits the interested reader to discover what philosophers have been saying about musical aesthetics throughout this century and before, and to learn with Scruton's assistance how unsatisfactory much of this work has been.

In the final portion of his book, Scruton is at his best. He happily pushes beyond his somewhat academic discussion of the history of musical aesthetics and in chapters on "Value" and "Culture" (Chapters 12 and 15 respectively) succeeds in doing precisely what philosophy should do for us laypeople. He engages the overarching and all-important issue of music's relationship to social values and indeed to culture as a whole. The combination of the intrinsic interest of this subject with the power of Scruton's mind generates an analysis that is reminiscent of—yet that surpasses—Allan Bloom's discussion of rock music in *The Closing of the American Mind*.

Among other things, we learn that there can be no value-free aesthetics of music, that taste matters not only to the individual but also to the collective body politic, and that both classical and pop music have recently fallen into rapid decline. Moreover, we learn why this is so via deep arguments stemming from first principles. This is philosophy at its best. A brief sampling of Scruton's discussion will illustrate these virtues.

In correctly identifying the delicious interplay of rhythm, harmony, and melody as the distinguishing feature that makes music so compelling to the listener, Scruton writes:

> Nobody who understands the experiences of melody, harmony, and rhythm will doubt their value. Not only are they the distillation of centuries of social life: they are also forms of knowledge, providing the competence to reach *out* of ourselves through music. Through melody, harmony, and rhythm, we enter a world where others exist besides the self, a world that is full of feeling but also ordered, disciplined but free. That is why music is a character-forming force, and the decline of musical taste is a decline in morals. The *anomie* of Nirvana and REM is the *anomie* of its listeners. To withhold all judgement, as though a taste in music were on a par with a taste in ice-cream, is precisely not to understand the power of music.

We are left at the end of the chapter on culture with the realization that most of today's rock music is devoid not only of melody and harmony, but even of anything more than mechanical rhythm. For the most part, all we have left is beat, and beat is at best a *reductio ad absurdum* of rhythm. Just contrast the monotonous beat of disco music with the insinuating rhythms of Ravel's *Boléro*.

The Aesthetics of Music, then, is a book possessing many virtues. If it nevertheless fails to fulfill its main ambition of being comprehensive, that is because of the fundamental inadequacy of the theory of aesthetic intent that Scruton sets forth. The central problem also lies in his point three above, namely that structuralism is both unnecessary and misguided in aesthetics. It is neither. As the Greeks first realized, any satisfactory aesthetics of music must combine a proper theory of structure with the kind of "experiential" theory of aesthetic intent that Scruton himself has helped to create.

Where does he go wrong? In my view, Scruton gets himself into trouble by making two fundamental mistakes. First, while justifiably criticizing the existing structuralist theories of Schenker and others, Scruton makes the logical error of assuming that since the particular theories that he reviews are inadequate, *no* adequate theory is either possible or necessary. But this is not the

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case, as I shall indicate below with a constructive counterexample.

Second, and far more fundamentally, Scruton violates what philosophers of science call "The Correspondence Principle." This rule states that when a theory is propounded to replace an earlier theory that works in certain contexts, the new theory must reduce back to the earlier one in appropriate limiting cases. For example, the ten metrical field equations of Einstein's general relativity reduce to the single potential function equation of Newton. In this important sense, Einstein's theory did not oust Newtonian physics, as many think, but rather generalized it.

The situation *should* be the same in aesthetics. A purportedly newer and better theory should build upon and extend those of yesteryear. In this regard, it is odd that Scruton proffers a theory with little if any relationship to the great tradition of aesthetics focusing on harmony, balance, and proportion. This tradition originated with the Greeks and flourished ever since, as Matila Ghyka's classic book *The Geometry of Art and Life* (1946) makes clear. Ghyka's book also reminds us that such classical principles as the Golden Section and eurythmy were intended to apply to *all* forms of art, music being but one special case.

It is also odd that, in ignoring this tradition, Scruton should be silent on what is perhaps the deepest challenge confronting aesthetics: the clarification of what exactly it is that makes a great work of art great, whether the work be music, painting or sculpture, or architecture. What is it that all such objects have in common? Or, to restate this in Scruton's language, what exactly is it that people share while experiencing the performance of a composition they all agree to be "very beautiful and moving"? It is my belief that Scruton cannot address these broader issues because he rejects the possibility of meaningful structural analysis. For to the extent that the enterprise of aesthetics attempts to explain what it is that unites differing objects of aesthetic interest sharing the same property—namely, beauty—then the enterprise is necessarily structural.

It should be helpful to illustrate this contention with a counterexample to Scruton's structuralist pessimism—one that suggests in the process that meaningful structural analysis is possible and indeed desirable in aesthetics of all kinds. Among other things, this counterexample will demonstrate that Scruton's most serious misgiving about structuralist theories is misplaced. For it will show that such theories *can* capture what he calls the "context-dependence" of structural properties, whether rhythmic, harmonic, or melodic. Scruton argues that they cannot do so.

To begin with, note that any object of aesthetic interest—ranging from a Bach fugue to a curvaceous Chippendale armchair—can be formally represented via a *decomposition* of its component parts into two disjoint sets. First, there is the set of themes, e.g., the subjects of the fugue, and the basic design element of the armchair which will typically be Hogarth's line-of-beauty "S-curve". For simplicity, let us assume there is a single theme. Second, there is a set of transformations of this theme that generates the remainder of the musical composition or the work of art—its "echoes," in effect. In the case of the fugue, these transformations will include such familiar operations as inversion, stretto, transposition from major to minor key, etc. In the case of the armchair, they will include the rotation, straightening, stretching, reflection, shortening/lengthening of the design element, etc. Jointly, the combined structure of a theme and its transformations fully represents the object.

Note that at least one such decomposition is always possible. For *any* identifiable portion of the work can be designated to be its theme, and *every* other portion can be generated by some transformation of this theme. Think of these other portions as "echoes" of the theme. Sometimes, there will be some natural theme(s) and an associated set of transformations. Obvious cases here would be a Bach fugue with its

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explicitly designated themes and subthemes or Mozart's theme and variations on the tune known in English as "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star." But there need be no obvious theme.

As a next step, let us consider the idea of the relative complexity of the theme and, separately, the relative complexity of the transformations, both of which can be given in formal mathematical terms. In the case of the "theme" or design element of the chair, an appropriate measure of the complexity can be objectively given as the degree of the polynomial equation representing the graph of the S-curve. This equation is cubic, so it is of degree 3. In the case of a kitchen chair with slats across the back, it is of degree 1 since the equation of a straight line (a slat) is linear.

The relative complexity of each transformation can be defined analogously, e.g., via what is called the "index" of the operator defining the particular transformation. In a geometric object like the chair, both a ninety-degree rotation and a reflection symmetry are relatively simple operators, whereas a convolution (twisting) is complex. The more work necessary to transform a particular theme into some "echo" of it appearing elsewhere in the chair or fugue, the *higher* the index value. Advances in mathematics make such a characterization possible regardless of whether the transformations involved are static, as in furniture or architecture, or dynamic, as in music. (In this context, it is worth recalling Schelling's description of architecture as "frozen music.")

Armed with these concepts, we can offer an account not only of the relative amount of order and balance to be found in an object of interest, but also of the degree of satisfaction that we derive from it. To understand this point, first consider that maximal harmony corresponds to the combination of a simple theme and simple transformations thereof, e.g., a straight-backed kitchen chair or a simple Gregorian chant. Maximal disorder corresponds to a complex theme and complex transformations thereof, e.g., much Victorian furniture and contemporary atonal music.

Now a high degree of satisfaction will typically result when the right balance between order and disorder is achieved, that is, when an "optimal tradeoff" has been struck between the two different complexities. If the theme is simple, then we are satisfied when its echoes are complex ("interesting"), and vice versa. This account makes it possible to clarify and indeed to quantify one of the deepest principles of aesthetics: the fact that people apprehending works of art are bored if there is too much simplicity (the kitchen chair, certain Gregorian chants), and overwhelmed if there is too much complexity (much atonal music, and pastiche Victorian furniture). They wish to be optimally challenged by experiencing the right amount of complexity. Another way to state this is that there is an optimal amount of symmetry (equivalently asymmetry) that is a necessary (yet certainly not sufficient) condition for a work to be found "pleasing". This is a principle running throughout aesthetics from the Greeks on down.

Three final points should be made about this theory of aesthetics as "structural success." First, it can be shown to subsume as a limiting special case the myriad relationships centering around the celebrated "aesthetic number" 1.618. For centuries, this algebraic number has been used to account for the aesthetic appeal of such diverse entities as the golden rectangle, the structure of the human body (observed by da Vinci), the Gothic cathedral, the arresting spiral of the nautilus shell, etc. By subsuming all this, the proposed theory satisfies the Correspondence Principle and makes it possible to unify much of aesthetic theory.

Second, this account is fully context-dependent. To see this, suppose we substitute straight arms for S-shaped arms in the Rococo chair. Then we obtain the following paradox: while a straight arm is much more simple than an S-curved arm, the chair that results is much more complicated—*too com-*

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plicated to be pleasing in fact. This is because too much "aesthetic energy" must now be expended in mentally transforming a complex S-theme into the simple straight line of the arms of the chair. The "tradeoff" measure lying at the heart of this theory fully captures this: it accords a "lower" aesthetic value to the chair with straight arms than to that with S-shaped arms. This form of context-dependence is similar to that lying at the heart of general relativity theory in physics: the degree of complexity of a given design element is continuously rescaled according to its context, exactly as the strength of the gravitational field is rescaled by the degree of space-time curvature at each point in the space-time manifold. All this is possible because both theories are *nonlinear* in the fundamental sense that everything is mutually coupled—that is, everything depends upon everything else. Scruton is right to insist on context dependence in structural analysis, perhaps more right than he realizes.

Third, and finally, while structural success as defined here is usually a *necessary* condition for an object to possess great aesthetic interest, it is certainly not sufficient. Additional consideration must be paid to the issue of which subsets of themes (e.g., melodies) strike us as beautiful, as well as which transformations are most pleasing. That is, why is the theme of the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony universally appealing? And why are the cadences in the middle of the first movement of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto or at the end of Bach's Toccata in F for organ so pleasurable? In my view, these questions can be partially answered by the same kinds of formal analysis sketched above, in particular the theory of transformation groups in abstract algebra.

Were Scruton's account of musical aesthetics to be extended to include these complementary structural dimensions of aesthetics, we would then come close to a truly comprehensive account of what it is that we actually "experience" in listening to good music, and why we like it. It will turn out that much of our satisfaction derives from an apprehension of latent structures, whether we are aware of these, or not. Yet an understanding of *why* this is true will require much more rigor than analytical philosophy has given us to date.

—*Horace W. Brock*

Roger Scruton replies:

Horace Brock raises an important question concerning my book *The Aesthetics of Music*, identifies what he takes to be a damaging lacuna in its argument, and offers an approach to aesthetics which promises, in his view, to make good the deficiencies in mine.

The important question is this: to what extent can "analytical philosophy," in the Anglo-American tradition, provide answers to fundamental questions of aesthetics? Mr. Brock's view is that this kind of philosophy—of which my book, he assumes, is an instance—is limited to conceptual and verbal enquiries, and cannot avail itself of the quasi-mathematical theories which the questions of aesthetics require. I reply as follows:

1. My perspective on philosophy owes as much to Kant and Hegel as it does to Wittgenstein and Frege (to name but four). I am not sure that I know what "analytical philosophy" is, but I do know that it is something more than word games.

2. Mr. Brock mentions the failure of analytical philosophy to make any progress in the field of ethics and political philosophy, until John Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice*, introduced concepts and theories from the mathematical discipline of de-

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cision theory. My view is that the borrowings from decision theory and game theory in Rawls are of little significance compared with his deeper borrowing from the moral philosophy of Kant, and that they do nothing whatsoever to overcome the difficulties that bedevil the Kantian enterprise.

3. I do not think that all the questions are answered by theory-building—certainly not theory-building of the kind favored by Mr. Brock. It is part of the philosophical naiveté of utilitarianism (with or without Harsanyi's formalization) that it commits itself to solving moral problems by a calculus.

Mr. Brock thinks that I do not seriously attempt to solve the most important question of which he gives several versions:

1. What makes a particular composition especially beautiful?
2. Why at the deepest level is it that people obtain such a great pleasure from compositions by Bach or Beethoven, or songs by Bob Dylan, when measured "objectively" on an applause meter?
3. What is it that makes a great work of art great, whether the work be music, painting or sculpture, or architecture?
4. What exactly is it that people share while experiencing the performance of a composition they all agree to be "very beautiful and moving"?

Most philosophers would say (and surely rightly) that there is not one question here but at least four. And they would say, again rightly, that Mr. Brock has not sufficiently distinguished questions of psychology—What goes on when people listen to music?—from questions of criticism—What is it in the music that merits their attention?—and from questions of philosophy—What is aesthetic appreciation, and when is it well-grounded? Only by running these three kinds of question together can Mr. Brock create the impression that a single theory will answer all of them, and that this theory will provide the key to aesthetic value. But the theory he offers is not merely utopian in its generality and deceptive in its spurious claim to rigor. It is a theory which leaves the questions of aesthetics exactly as they were. At best it would offer a psychological *explanation* as to why some people (perhaps the majority) take pleasure in certain kinds of music and visual arrangements. But it would provide no basis for the aesthetic judgment that they are right to take such a pleasure, or for the critical judgment that there is a meaning and a value in the objects that produce it.

It is easy to envisage a psychological explanation of the characteristic pleasures of the pop-fan: the surrender to beat at the expense of rhythm, the lapse into repetition, and the loss of thought that comes from a music without inner voices, generated entirely by an electronic pulse. But such a theory would not begin to tell us how and why we might criticize the taste which it describes. Nor could it possibly answer question three above.

Consider a parallel instance. A sociobiologist could provide a theory which explains moral judgment, in the following terms: societies which uphold certain prohibitions (against murder, incest, marital infidelity, theft, etc.) acquire an evolutionary advantage over societies which do not. Hence, in the struggle for survival, they are likely to win out. Hence any deep structure in the human brain which favors such prohibitions will be reproduced. So it is likely that moral conformity, of the kind we observe, will emerge in the long term. That theory could be true, for all I know. But it is surely preposterous to suppose that it is an answer to the question posed by Kant—namely, what are the *grounds* for the judgment that "Thou shalt not kill"? The fact that we are disposed by nature to make a certain judgment is no grounds for its truth—or else the earth is flat.

Mr. Brock argues that I violate the "Cor-

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respondence Principle"—namely the principle that a theory which replaces a refuted theory must generate the refuted theory as a limiting case. But this principle applies only to *scientific* theories—theories which provide causal explanations of observable phenomena. It has no application to philosophical theories, which are concerned not to explain but to justify. By binding himself to the Correspondence Principle, Mr. Brock ensures that the theory which he eventually discovers will be a theory of the wrong kind.

Mr. Brock is right in suggesting that I have not given an answer to the deep question of aesthetics—the question how aesthetic judgments are justified. It is a question that lies beyond theories of the kind that he is attached to—as I have tried to show, in connection with that wretched number 1.618, in *The Aesthetics of Architecture*. Nevertheless, in my book on music, I go some way to answering the question. My suggestion is that music involves the creation of an imaginary movement in an imaginary space, and that our response to this movement involves the mental rehearsal of gestures, passions, and actions which have their moral reality in the social sphere. Great music leads us into a higher and nobler world of feeling, where love, commitment and self-sacrifice are given their imaginative embodiment. We enter that world through an act of imaginative understanding, and the purpose of criticism is to get us to focus on the features of music that we must hear if we are to hear with understanding. The difference between great music and bad music is, in the end, the difference between virtue and vice—but recreated in the imaginary realm of fictive movement.

Aesthetic value is certainly objective, just as virtue is. But I don't believe it can be measured by an applause meter, or that it is equally to be found in Bach and Bob Dylan.

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Three late poems *by Jorge Luis Borges*

During a particularly awkward interview, Jorge Luis Borges was asked whether he considered himself to be more a "writer" than a "poet." Responding with his accustomed self-deprecating humility, Borges answered by saying that "I am a poet, absolutely. I don't think that I am anything but a poet. I may be a clumsy poet, but I do hope that I am a poet." These declarations might surprise most Anglophone readers of this elusive artist who identify him with the famous essays and short stories. Besides, the English translation of Borges's *Selected Poems* (1972) has been long out of print. This spring, Viking will publish a more generous selection in a bilingual edition, from which the following translations are taken.

Borges was right. The distinction between "writer" and "poet" makes no sense when applied to him. *All* of Borges's work —from the short stories and essays to the parables and verse—are stunning examples of the unleashed poetic imagination. Moreover, we should recall that the first three books he published in Buenos Aires during the Twenties were indeed books of verse. He published his first poem in 1919, the "Hymn to the Sea." It begins "O sea! O myth! O wide resting place!" Not much needs to be said about this adolescent effusion except that it is written in the shadow of his then idol Walt Whitman. Borges didn't want to imitate Walt Whitman; he wanted to *be* Walt Whitman, just as his future character Pierre Menard wanted to be Cervantes and write the *Quixote* again for the twentieth century. Much later Borges ruefully noted that "when I came across Arnold Bennett's phrase 'the third-rate grandiose,' I understood at once what he meant."

The young Borges turned himself into an experimental poet, almost a dadaist, delighting in verbal play, metaphors, the avoidance of the heroic and the pathetic. But he soon came under the influence of the classical tradition and the critical declarations of T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" ("Only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from those things"). Borges could then be seen scouring bookstores in Buenos Aires, buying up copies of his vanguardist volumes in order to consign them to the flames. These three books were later reissued with the same titles in Spanish, but many poems were thrown out, and practically every line of those remaining had been revised following a more calculated poetic sensibility.

This *other* Borges, the meditative and profoundly metaphysical writer, is presented below. What we see here is a poet of intentional verbal penury. Typically, the poems are laconic, sober, and serene, full of intense though muted feeling. As for his earlier experimental stage, as Borges has his protagonist say in "Averroës' Search": "to free oneself from an error, it is best to have put it into practice beforehand."

—*Alexander Coleman*

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La moneda de hierro

Aquí está la moneda de hierro. Interroguemos
Las dos contrarias caras que séran la respuesta
De la terca demanda que nadie no se ha hecho:
¿Por qué precisa un hombre que una mujer lo quiera?
Miremos. En el orbe superior se entretejen
El firmamento cuádruple que sostiene el diluvio
Y las inalterables estrellas planetarias.
Adán, el joven padre, y el joven Paraíso.
La tarde y la mañana. Dios en cada criatura.
En ese labertino puro está tu reflejo.
Arrojemos de nuevo la moneda de hierro
Que es también un espejo mágico. Su reverso
Es nadie y nada y sombra y ceguera. Eso eres.
De hierro las dos caras labran un solo eco.
Tus manos y tu lengua son testigos inficles.
Dios es el inasible centro de la sortija.
No exalta ni condena. Hace algo más: olvida.
Calumniado de infama ¿por qué no han de quererte?
En la sombra del otro buscamos nuestra sombra;
En el cristal del otro, nuestro cristal recíprico.

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The iron coin

Before us is the iron coin. Now let us ask
The two opposing faces what the answer will be
To the intractable demand no one has made:
Why does a man require a woman to desire him?
Let us look. In the higher orb are interwoven
The firmament's four strata that uphold the flood
And the unalterable planetary stars.
Adam, the youthful father, and young Paradise.
The afternoon and morning. God in every creature.
In that pure labyrinth you'll find your own reflection.
Once again let us discard the iron coin,
Which is a magic mirror also. Its reverse
Is no one, nothing, shadow, blindness. You are that.
The pair of iron faces fashions a single echo.
Your hands and tongue are unreliable witnesses.
God is the unapproachable center of the ring.
He does more than exalt or sentence: he forgets.
Slandered with infamy, why shouldn't they desire you?
Within the other's shadow, we pursue our shadow.
Within the other's mirror, our reciprocal mirror.

—Translated by Eric McHenry

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El alquimista

Lento en el alba un joven que han gastado
La larga reflexíon y las avaras
Vigilias considera ensimismado
Los insomnes braseros y alquitaras.

Sabe que el oro, ese Proteo, acecha
Bajo cualquier azar, como el destino;
Sabe que está en el polvo del camino,
En el arco, en el brazo y en la flecha.

En su oscura visión de un ser secreto
Que se oculta en el astro y en el lodo,
Late aquel otro sueño de que todo
Es agua, que vio Tales de Mileto.

Otra visión habrá; la de un eterno
Dios cuya ubicua faz es cada cosa,
Que explicará el geométrico Spinoza
En un libro más arduo que el Averno . . .

En los vastos confines orientales
Del azul palidecen los planetas,
El alquimista piensa en las secretas
Leyes que unen planetas y metales.

Y mientras cree tocar enardecido
El oro aquél que matará la Muerte.
Dios, que sabe de alquimia, lo convierte
En polvo, en nadie, en nada y en olvido.

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The alchemist

Slow in the dawn, a young man, hollow-eyed
from lengthy thought and unrewarding vigils,
is lost in his reflections, contemplating
the sleepless braziers and the silent stills.

He knows that gold, that Proteus, is lurking
in all chance happenings, like destiny;
he knows it hides in the dust along the way,
in the action of the bow, the arm, the arrow.

His occult vision of a secret being
hidden in the stars and in raw earth
echoes that other dream, that everything
is water, the dream of Thales of Miletus.

There's another vision, that of an eternal
God who appears in every single thing,
as Spinoza the geometer explains
in a book more tortuous than all of Hell.

In the vast blue expanses to the west,
the planets are beginning to grow pale.
The alchemist is thinking of his secrets,
the secret laws that link planet and metal.

And while he dreams of finding in the fire
that true gold that will put an end to dying,
God, who knows His alchemy, transforms him
to no one, dust, oblivion.

—Translated by Alastair Reid

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Things that might have been

Pienso en las cosas que pudieron ser y no fueron.
El tratado de mitología sajona que Beda no escribió.
La obra inconcebible que a Dante le fue dada acaso entrever,
Ya corregido el último verso de la Comedia.
La historia sin la tarde de la Cruz y la tarde de la cicuta.
La historia sin el rostro de Helena.
El hombre sin los ojos, que nos han deparado la luna.
En las tres jornadas de Gettysburg la victoria del Sur.
El amor que no compartimos,
El dilatado imperio que los Vikings no quisieron fundar.
El orbe sin la rueda o sin la rosa.
El juicio de John Donne sobre Shakespeare.
El otro cuerno del Unicornio.
El ave fabulosa de Irlanda, que está en dos lugares a un tiempo.
El hijo que no tuve.

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Things that might have been

I think about things that might have been and never were.
The treatise on Saxon myths that Bede omitted to write.
The inconceivable work that Dante may have glimpsed
As soon as he corrected the Comedy's last verse.
History without two afternoons: that of the hemlock, that of the Cross.
History without Helen's face.
Man without the eyes that have granted us the moon.
Over three Gettysburg days, the victory of the South.
The love we never shared.
The vast empire the Vikings declined to found.
The globe without the wheel, or without the rose.
John Donne's judgment of Shakespeare.
The Unicorn's other horn.
The fabled Irish bird which alights in two places at once.
The child I never had.

—Translated by Hoyt Rogers

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Theater

The revenge of art

by Mark Steyn

For a salesman, there is no rock bottom to the life. He don't put a bolt to a nut, he don't tell you the law or give you medicine. He's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back—that's an earthquake.
—Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*

For Willy Loman's creator, Arthur Miller, they haven't been smiling back for three decades. Broadway's lousy territory, and so's Hollywood, and for the most part he's retreated to London, where the disinterest of his native land is seen merely as confirmation of his status. As Miller likes to tell fawning British interviewers, "In New York they have shows, but in London you still have plays." Yet here he is, pushing eighty-four, back in what he would no doubt call, with his quaintly stilted vernacular, "the show business." He smiles out from my daily paper, standing underneath a sign for "Arthur Miller Way," as his block of Forty-Ninth Street has been renamed for the duration. Miller is being given a very show-biz honor: a "50th anniversary" production of *Death of a Salesman* (from Chicago's Goodman Theatre, and now at the Eugene O'Neill). And for the moment the box-office is boffo.

"Attention must be paid!" demanded Miller in the play's most famous line. And, in high-school drama classes at least, it has been. *Salesman*'s arc is well known: Willy's complacency, the loss of his job and the collapse of his world, his rejection of a fresh start in Alaska, his decision to commit suicide in an automobile accident so that his family will get his crummy life insurance . . . You can take the play any number of ways: is it, as Harold Clurman saw it, "a challenge to the American dream"? or is it, as a couple of real live commercial travelers are supposed to have remarked after seeing the show in 1949, just that Willy is a third-rate salesman?

Half a century on, the traveling man is no longer the vital embodiment of capitalism's core activity but a figure as remote as milkmen or icemen or Pullman porters. Indeed, the unanticipated obsolescence which strikes Willy Loman seems in danger of afflicting the play, too, to the point where *Salesman* feels at times like a piece of unwitting autobiography: now, as then, Willy Loman is a shambling hulk—Lee J. Cobb in 1949, Brian Dennehy in 1999; but, in the intervening decades, the author has filled out, too. The scrawny, bespectacled Jewish intellectual who snuck Marilyn Monroe out from under Joltin' Joe is now a big bull of a man with massive carpenter's hands, capable of fashioning a table out of a cherry tree split by lightning and of pulling his rowboat across the pond of his Connecticut estate. At the O'Neill, *Salesman* opens in silhouette: Dennehy's huge frame hunched in the doorway, sample case in each hand. Mark Wendland's designs labor the point: in the cramped, dingy rooms of his home,

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the salesman is almost literally boxed in, up against the wall, grazing his head against the ceiling. He's a man imprisoned by his own fears—returning from a sales trip because he couldn't get past Yonkers. If neither Cobb nor Dennehy look like anybody's idea of a mid-twentieth-century traveling man, well, Miller doesn't look like anybody's idea of a late twentieth-century playwright, either.

Unlike most of the British theater's polytechnic socialists, he's managed to get a little dirt under his fingernails. He worked as a trucker and in an auto parts warehouse, which provided the material for *A Memory Of Two Mondays* (1955); he was a shipfitter's apprentice at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, which gave him the background for *Two Mondays*'s companion piece, *A View From the Bridge*. Curiously, the physicality of the man finds little resonance across the footlights: his plays are wordy and seem almost pathologically resistant to much in the way of staging. So *Salesman* is a life vacuum-packed—past and present jammed together, mingled and muddled, and shattering into a thousand shards spinning back and forth across the calendar. Robert Falls's production puts the action on two concentric turntables: as in a kaleidoscope, reality, memory and fantasy are always shifting, rearranging themselves, without ever settling into any reliably fixed pattern.

Martin Amis, discussing his father Kingsley a while back, said that every novelist dreads the moment when someone younger comes along and says, "That's not the way it is. It's like this." In 1949, Miller was very much in "This is how it is" mode: the play's tone is that of a cocky youngster upbraiding his elders for failing to see it coming. Thus, in the second act, Willy gets fired by his new boss Howard, the son of his old employer. He's bewildered by what's happened, can't really believe it. "I named him," he tells his pal Charley, "I named him Howard." "Willy," sighs Charley, "when you gonna realise that them things don't mean anything?" The scene seems an eerie pre-echo of Miller's own bewilderment at being sloughed off by younger know-nothing producers: the triumphs of the past count for nought. The play presumes to tell us about the dead heart of the American dream, but if anything it seems more pertinent as a meditation on the vicissitudes of a life in that luridly exaggerated form of capitalism, show business. "The play is the most poignant statement of man as he must face himself to have come out of our theater," wrote John Mason Brown fifty years ago. "Mr. Miller's play is a tragedy modern and personal, not classic and heroic. Its central figure is a little man sentenced to discover his smallness rather than a big man undone by his greatness."

What to Brown was the play's virtue seems more like a gaping defect now, for in the years since 1949 dramatists—of stage and screen—have fetishized the nowhere men of the American landscape to a degree that would baffle their predecessors: the iconic American loser shuffles along the cultural horizon eking out a hardscrabble existence from the dusty, over-tilled soil. Dennehy is a fine, powerful actor, but his performance here is oddly unaffecting, a kind of bravado flailing but without any sadness or sorrow: you find it hard to believe the hale-fellow routine is anything more than that—transparent and unconvincing. The director Robert Falls has chosen to repoint the play towards Willy's wife Linda (Elizabeth Franz) and son Biff (Kevin Anderson), to the extent that, insofar as we feel Loman's pain, it isn't until his widow kneels by his grave and quietly tells him that she's made the final payment on their house. The play is now suffused in Biff's self-loathing—almost as if it's Willy Loman's last sale, the one his family will never pay off.

But, in giving greater weight to the supporting players, Falls leaves the central character exposed. Miller has said that, at the back of his mind, he had an old uncle—a man whose politics were all to cock but whom he loved humanly. That's not such an unusual dichotomy, but the author never seems on top of it: his view of his protag-

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onist isn't ambivalent so much as incoherent. For example, when we meet Willy, he's going nuts, and we assume this is because his life and work have eaten him up and spit him out. But then we see him a couple of decades earlier, and he's already nuts. The eponymous salesman is supposedly destroyed by his dedication to capitalist orthodoxy, yet the play keeps telling us that Willy isn't dedicated at all—he just chugs along half-heartedly. The more you try to take Willy Loman seriously as a major dramatic creation, the more he shrivels and falls between your fingers.

Pace John Mason Brown, *Death of a Salesman* isn't a tragedy, any more than *Electra*—to take another domestic and personal drama—would be if it were about a little woman sentenced to discover her smallness. Willy evokes only pity, which isn't enough for tragedy. Yet the play is a Broadway masterpiece. It stands poised at midcentury, using an archetype of the first half to project the nullity of the second half. And, though we have sated on losers in the years since, this one remains a singular achievement. "For once in my life," he tells his wife, "I'd like to own something outright before it breaks." But he never does. Instead, *he* breaks—the salesman who gets sold, on a ton of stuff he'll never be clear of—the Frigidaire and Hoover, the washer and water heater, and all the other high-debt "conveniences" "bought" on what the British aptly call "the never-never."

The idea of man as a doomed participant in a lifelong gameshow is especially American, and Miller's play raises it to the level of greatness. "The tragedy of Willy Loman," said the playwright in 1950, "is that he gave his life, or sold it, in order to justify the waste of it. It is the tragedy of a man who did believe that he alone was not meeting the qualifications laid down for mankind by those clean-shaven frontiersmen who inhabit the peaks of broadcasting and advertising offices. From those forests of canned goods, high up near the sky, he heard the thundering command to succeed as it ricocheted down the newspaper-lined canyons of his city, heard not a human voice, but a wind of a voice to which no human can reply in kind, except to stare into the mirror at a failure." On the other hand, at least two major corporations invited the playwright to address their sales conventions.

In the years since, it sometimes seems as if Arthur Miller, like Willy Loman, is a little man sentenced to discover his smallness. On Broadway, this demi-centennial aside, on the rare occasions his plays are produced, they fold with indecent haste. In Hollywood, the "long-awaited" 1996 film of his McCarthyite parable *The Crucible* waited, alas, too long, seeming merely a dutiful adaptation alongside what passes for "art-house" hits these days (e.g., *The English Patient*). For modern Hollywood, the McCarthy era is the equivalent of the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War or the Irish Republicans' Easter Uprising: their sense of self, of nobility of purpose, derives from it. It was, after all, the only time anyone could ever be bothered persecuting them. If even they can't get excited about *The Crucible*, what hope is there for anyone else? So Miller has retreated to less lousy territories.

Like many great men, he tends to judge other cultures by how readily they acknowledge his genius. I once had a conversation about Bosnia with Erica Jong, who told me, with a straight face, that what convinced her that Washington had to send troops to the Balkans was that when she'd been walking through the streets of Sarajevo dozens of people cried out: "Erica! Erica! We love you!" Such a civilization must not be allowed to perish. Likewise, in Russia, Gorbachev hailed Miller as a colossus, so Miller was happy to reciprocate. Above all, there was what's become the least lousy territory on the circuit—London—where the theater's subsidy-junkies, unlike their straitened comrades-in-arms across the ocean, can afford to indulge their smug condescension towards America's anti-Communist "paranoia." As Miller has drily observed, the very word "Communist" struck fear into the hearts of millions of Americans in the

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Forties and Fifties. Those poor, impressionable chumps, eh? After the war, the Communists very nearly took over Greece and Italy; in 1945, the Soviet stooges seized Poland; in 1946, Bulgaria; in 1947, Hungary and Romania; 1948, Czechoslovakia; 1949, China . . . And, in 1953, Miller wrote *The Crucible*, putting the work of the House Un-American Activities Committee on a par with the Puritan witch-hunts.

Even at the time, the unsoundness of the metaphor was pointed out to Miller: witches, by and large, didn't exist, whereas Communists did—and recently opened KGB files tend, on the whole, to support McCarthy's estimate of their numbers rather than Miller's. But who'll speak for Joe McCarthy now? "You know," Miller told Nicholas Hytner, director of *The Crucible*, "McCarthy is dust, and this play is still alive! It's the revenge of art!" In this last year, he's responded encouragingly to those who find in the play an allegory for our modish if entirely mythical variation on a theme, "sexual McCarthyism." And why not? Miller himself has certainly never had cause to revise his views. His 1997 *New Yorker* account of "Why I Wrote *The Crucible*" was virtually unchanged from a similar essay of 1967—though in these post-Soviet times Miller was cautious enough not to use his original title, "It Could Happen Here—And Did." That's not so much the revenge of art as the arrogance—equating the enslavement of millions with the stalled careers of a few dozen actors and writers.

Maybe we should look on it as the revenge of Art—for Art Miller's analysis of the failures of American society owes as much to his own experiences in American show business as anything else. In his now familiar Broadway-bashing interviews for the British press, his shows-vs.-plays argument, as with his characterizations of capitalism and Communism, is refined to the point of inanity: after all, London has given New York *Cats*, *Starlight Express*, and *Phantom of the Opera*—shows on a scale the nickel 'n' dime natives of Forty-Second Street had never contemplated; indeed, one of the reasons why Nicholas Hytner could afford to direct the film of *The Crucible* is because he's getting three percent of the weekly gross for staging *Miss Saigon*. Listen to Miller's critique and you understand the glibness of much of his later work: is a man who sees the form he's worked in all his life in such facile cartoon terms likely to have much to tell us about the rest of the world? It never seems to occur to him, as he rages against "shows," that his heyday was also that of Broadway show business. His three best plays—*Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible*, *A View From the Bridge*—were all produced by that shrewd accountant-turned-showman Kermit Bloomgarden. The loss of Bloomgarden is something for which not all the insulated cosiness of the National Theatre's South Bank bunker can compensate. Miller prospered when Broadway prospered, and he has declined with it.

Miller has been gracious enough to modify certain views in recent years—he no longer believes in a Soviet-style command economy—though he still claims to be anti-capitalist because capitalism gave us Nazism and Fascism, no matter that both are travesties of capitalism, more closely aligned to Communism. And, even as we salute a rich season of Broadway revivals that will see *Salesman* competing for a Tony with *Electra* and *The Iceman Cometh*, you can't honestly compare its author with Euripides or O'Neill. John Mason Brown's line about the little man and his smallness echoes across the years. It may be that, far from being possessed of unique insights, artists are uniquely ill-equipped to anatomize society. If you're a playwright whose plays can't support themselves in the commercial theater, it's understandable that you're attracted to a command economy. But the rest of us should be grateful that Miller's views on McCarthyism, Communism, and American malaise have not prevailed. Half a century after its "challenge to the American dream," this *Death of a Salesman* derives its muscle from the relationship between father and son: an Ibsenite family

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drama that, unlike Ibsen, never persuasively challenges the existing order. Arthur Miller is more like his uncle than he knows: the politics are all to cock, but at a human level he's hard to resist.

A decade older than *Salesman* and supposedly as moldy as old cheese, *Babes in Arms* (part of City Center's Encores series) comes up fresh and sparkling. This is the 1937 Rodgers and Hart musical that launched an indestructible and endlessly parodied cliché: a bunch of kids facing removal to a work farm decide to put on a show in a barn. But what a show! The score has such an indecent wealth of A-list standards—"The Lady Is A Tramp," "I Wish I Were In Love Again," "Where Or When," "My Funny Valentine"—that it almost seems as if Rodgers and Hart (who also wrote the book) were operating, as a professional challenge, by some weird kind of formula in which the triviality of the play is inversely proportional to the depth of the songs. They're big hits, but they're also, unmistakably, theater songs. No Tin Pan Alley lyricist would rhyme, as Lorenz Hart does in "Funny Valentine," "Your looks are laughable/Unphotographable," and make a six-syllable word seem like the most natural thing in the world to find in a love song. And no Alley composer would do as Richard Rodgers does and climb an octave higher for the climax of the lyric: "Stay, little Valentine, *Stay*!"

And yet the ballad is also an early, elementary attempt at integration: the subject of the song is a guy called Val, short for Valentine. You can forgive a silly musical-comedy book an awful lot if just one unimportant name among the dramatis personae enables a song this good. Or one with the pop-Freudian ruminations of "Where Or When." Or the worldly self-awareness of:

> The furtive sigh,
> The blackened eye,
> The words "I'll love you till the day I die,"
> The self-deception that believes the lie—
> I wish I were in love again.

Somehow, in the years since, we've gotten the process backwards. There's no point having a coherent, grown-up play if it doesn't prompt great songs; there is no greater waste of time than the unmusical musical. And yet, among Broadway's current crop, the elephantine earnestness of *Ragtime* is the best that we can hope for—shows full of bloodless, overwrought anthems, delivered yearningly by the cast as they come downstage and practically reach across the footlights to demand you take them as seriously as they do. A musical comedy like *Babes in Arms* proceeds on what seems, if only in hindsight, the entirely rational basis that you can have shallow and corny characters who are deepened and matured by the songs they sing—and, come to think of it, isn't that how real life passes, with different degrees of intensity? *Ragtime*, by contrast, plods on at the same level of worthy solemnity, whether they're speaking or singing. The talent in *Babes in Arms* is lightly worn, and that's its strength. Kathleen Marshall, a choreographer who doesn't often get shows she deserves, directs wittily and straightforwardly.

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Music

The meanspirited wunderkind

by David Mermelstein

Though it took the English 250 years to find a worthy successor to Henry Purcell, the wait may well have been worth it, given that the Chosen One was Benjamin Britten. Now, just two decades after Britten's death, the English believe a new musical savior has risen. His name is Thomas Adès, and he's all of twenty-seven years old. Last year, he was appointed music director of the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, and this year he assumes the artistic directorship of Britten's old stamping ground, the prestigious Aldeburgh Festival. In December, his first opera, the three-year-old *Powder Her Face*, appeared at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), and most of New York's musical establishment came out to hear it.

The advance word was that here was a work of uncommon brilliance: sharp-edged and provocative, yet also musically inventive and even forward-looking. The British, ever parochial when it comes to native sons, had dubbed Adès a visionary, but the bits of evidence that made their way across the Atlantic suggested that Adès's talents extended beyond chauvinism. EMI, which signed Adès to an exclusive contract, had already released three albums of his varied oeuvre, which included, in addition to *Powder Her Face*, a string quartet, some vaguely programmatic works, a hymn, a neo-Baroque sonata, a short song cycle, and two solo piano works. Moreover, Adès is—like Britten—a gifted pianist and conductor who has not hesitated to lend a hand toward advancing his reputation before the public.

Imagine, then, the sense of betrayal, to say nothing of disappointment, one felt upon realizing that *Powder Her Face* is a sham. The huzzahs of more than a few respected critics notwithstanding, Adès's opera is not so much an assault upon convention as an outright mugging. Like a boorish party guest who insists on speaking right in your face despite (or perhaps because of) his very bad breath, *Powder Her Face* forces audiences to hold their noses as it spews malodorous bile. The source of one's frustration is not so much Adès's score—though the music lacks sustained themes and connective tissue—but rather this opera's subject, or, more precisely, its treatment of its subject.

Through its fractured structure and use of chic irony, the opera tries to distance itself from its inspiration, but it never goes far enough. And thus, the sad and fascinating tale of England's Margaret Whigham Sweeny is very much at the center of things. A great beauty who upon her second marriage became the Duchess of Argyll, Margaret later found herself embroiled in one of the century's most notorious divorce cases. The 1963 judgment found for her husband, and Margaret was publicly shamed by a 65,000-word verdict that upbraided her for "disgusting sexual activities" and a "debased sexual appetite." In particular, she seems to have favored men, often servants, with a

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rather too intimate form of gratification. As Terry Teachout so efficiently put it in *Time* magazine, the Duchess was both able and willing when it came to providing the "Full Monica."

In our ever-coarsening culture, mention of such things, while certainly not to be encouraged, must reluctantly be accepted. And yet there are ways of handling vulgar topics with restraint. To suggest that Adès and his librettist Philip Hensher, a well-regarded English critic and novelist, failed in their attempt at discretion is to ignore the enjoyment both men seem to have derived from the Duchess's self-inflicted debasement. One is tempted to speculate on the possible motives for this misogyny, but let's leave that to the professionals. Unfortunately, audiences must endure Adès and Hensher's perverted pleasure (and pleasure at perversion) throughout this opera, for the central leitmotif in *Powder Her Face* is of unrestrained glee at an unfulfilled life coming apart at the seams. Hensher's libretto practically exults in the Duchess's myriad humiliations. And even Adès's score—a glittering, clanging, crashing amalgam of arresting sounds spiked with ersatz 1930s dance tunes and fleeting moments of Straussian introspection—begrudges this opera's protagonist a moment of musical compassion.

One could, of course, contend that's precisely the point of this opera: a meditation-cum-reverie on our culture's fascination with excess, decline and fall, superficiality, and other ills. But that hardly explains the pervasive meanspiritedness that colors this work. Indeed, what Adès and Hensher fail to realize is that it's precisely their opera's nihilistic approach that will repel audiences from the ideas that lie at its heart. Maybe the relative youth of both composer and librettist accounts for the naughty schoolboy aesthetic pervading this work, but it is only on those terms that the opera provides any sort of excitement—and even then the thrill is joyless.

Having said all that, I found the production of *Powder Her Face* presented by BAM and the Brooklyn Philharmonic an odd amalgam of offensiveness and panache. There was certainly a defiant spirit at work here. The staging—or semistaging, as it were—came via the Aspen Music Festival, where the opera had its American premiere in the summer of 1997. Edward Berkeley, who directed that production, oversaw this one as well, and the four singers (performing seventeen roles) who composed the Brooklyn cast were also Aspen alumni, as was the set and costume designer Anne C. Patterson. What audiences at the Brooklyn performances probably noticed first—that is, after they took the measure of the decrepit Majestic Theater—was the striking way in which Patterson's two-tiered sets very nearly integrated the orchestra into the action. In a chamber opera like this one, the scheme made perfect sense. Some of the decorative items, too, struck one as ideal: the old wind-up gramophone; the large, battered trunk; the dowdy, well-built furniture upholstered in a muted filigree pattern. It was all so suggestive of a fine hotel, just as Hensher's libretto required. But then what of that large bed on which appeared pillows resembling ample female breasts (complete with nipples)? Toward the foot of the bed, like a rumpled coverlet, lay an upholstered pair of spread legs. Mercifully, my distance from the stage prevented me from discerning much more detail.

Restraint has little place in this sordid series of surrealistic tableaux, which career across time and space, from 1990 to the Thirties to the Fifties to 1970 and then back to 1990. "Fetch my life," the Duchess exclaims early on, but Hensher never tells us much about her. For the most part, the action, such as it is, takes place in hotel rooms, but the work's dramatic climax, at the beginning of the second act, occurs when an unsympathetic judge rules against the Duchess and she begins her downward spiral. Yet the verdict is hardly this opera's most memorable moment. That dubious honor comes in Act I, when the Duchess in a fit of lust and loneliness seduces a hotel

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waiter. There are several ways in which this now-infamous scene might have been written, but Adès and Hensher don't believe in stinting on veracity, at least not here. The act is portrayed graphically, with the Duchess on her knees in front of the waiter, who has dropped his trousers. Soon she begins to moan, and a sort of humming chorus for one ensues, with the Duchess accompanied first by an accordion (of all things!) and then by various other instruments. The sequence concludes aptly, with a prolonged gagging-and-coughing fit.

Still, throughout this excruciating effort, Adès manages to create music that, at its best, is bold, inventive, sly, catchy and invigorating. Adès really is a bona fide talent. It is no empty compliment to say that this composer hears sounds the rest of us don't—until, that is, he sets them down for us to savor. His music speaks to listeners. Who else would think to couple a viola and trombone in a vamp? Or thrust bebop into the middle of an operatic score? And what modern composer, save Astor Piazzolla, makes such use of the accordion? To be sure, Adès's music jumps too eagerly from idea to idea. Like a hyperactive child, it refuses to sit still when we wish it would. But a unifying thread runs through these strains, barely perceptible sometimes, yet no less present for its low profile. Occasionally, Adès generates mood almost for its own sake, as when the Duke first enters. The motif signifies fate, of course, but the composer puts a cinematic spin on it by making it sound like a theme from some B-movie melodrama. In the Judge's aria—which progresses from stately to sputtering to hysterical—Adès does something similar, but for comic effect. By combining pizzicatos in the strings with brass wailings and inventive percussion clusters, he creates a courtroom environment in which Lewis Carroll's Queen of Hearts would be right at home.

Adès achieves his striking musical effects in large part through inventive orchestration. When was the last time a pit band had more winds than strings, or a prepared piano and fishing reels in its arsenal? And though the composer makes extraordinary demands on the fifteen-member orchestra he requires for this opera, there is an element of fun here no player can resist. The percussionist is luckiest of all, trying his hand at everything from a rattle to a whip to a popgun, in addition to a whole series of drums. (My favorite of the score's instructions reads as follows: "metal dustbin full of crockery and cutlery; four mugs to throw in.") At BAM the game, polished musicians were all members of the Brooklyn Philharmonic. Led with estimable vigor and commitment by the conductor Robert Spano (the orchestra's music director and a dedicated advocate of new works), they gave Adès's score, regardless of its shortcomings, as good a performance as it is likely to get.

The singers were less successful. As the Duchess, the soprano Marie O'Brien sang with a tight, focused sound. Hers was a thankless role, but O'Brien, looking like a plump Helena Bonham Carter, shouldered the part with a generally regal bearing—when that was possible, of course. The soprano Heather Buck, in a variety of roles (Maid, Mistress, Society Journalist, etc.), made a more favorable impression, trilling nicely. With a pretty figure, natural charm, and a voice like a pull-whistle, she was easily this production's standout performer. The bass Allen Schrott (as the Duke, the Judge, the Hotel Manager/Death, etc.) also seemed well suited to his duties. Though there was some weakness in his bottom tones, his crisp diction and lean good looks made him a powerful force on the stage. The tenor Trevor Smith (Electrician, Waiter, Lounge Lizard, etc.) fared worst. Lacking vocal power, he swallowed many of his notes and never seemed comfortable in Adès and Hensher's tawdry world.

The papers report that Adès has already gained a commission for a new work from the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, so it's no use hoping that this talented composer will leave music dramas to others. He will be a vibrant force in opera. Thus we must wish for something else, something

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simple. We must trust that Thomas Adès, wunderkind, grows up. Adès can be a deep, sophisticated composer, so this is no pipe dream. Gifted youngsters like to show off; Mozart certainly did, albeit in ways that seem less rude to us today. Adès may not ever disavow *Powder Her Face*, but he should move beyond its shallow flash. Vulgarity is beneath his talents.

Concert Notes

Káťa Kabanová, by Leoš Janáček, at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York.

Jonathan Miller's staging of Janáček's *Káťa Kabanová* at the Metropolitan Opera was ghastly in 1991; revived in 1999, it seems even less excusable. Miller has the reverse of the Midas touch, dependably turning what he touches into dross. I have bemoaned his *Pelléas* (see "Dumbing down Debussy" in the May 1995 *New Criterion*); his *Káťa* is no less appalling. His current highly-praised Met *Nozze di Figaro* may be a shade more circumspect, but surely does not deserve the critical raves it has garnered. Though mostly well sung and decently played, directorially this *Káťa* is as effective a bomb as any anarchist ever detonated.

The primal disaster is the décor of Robert Israel, obviously worked out in cahoots with the director. The parallel love scene for the Káťa-Boris and Varvara-Kudrjaš couples should be set in a ravine behind the Kabanov house, as the Met program notes duly make clear. This is a sort of secret garden reached through the gate in a fence and down a winding path. Overgrown with shrubbery, it creates a romantic atmosphere and favors discreet sexual consummation. It also allows us to hear simultaneously the more exalted lovemaking of the main pair, unseen in the distant bushes, and the earthier dalliance of the comic pair in full view downstage.

The text makes much of this setting: the strategies involved in getting the key to the gate, the path down which the tremulous Káťa descends to her upward-yearning lover, the natural surroundings that the music lovingly evokes. But what does the highly unromantic meeting of Miller and Israel make of this? We are in what looks to be a town square, with the rear of the Kabanov residence to our left, and another building facing us in the distance. Even without late-night pedestrians abroad, there could be insomniacs indulging at voyeurism at various windows, not to mention that the sterile asphalt surroundings are unpropitious to horizontal goings-on, and Káťa and Boris are hardly the up-against-the-wall kind of lovers.

Both musically and dramatically the garden locale is mandatory. The scene comes at the exact middle of the opera and is its romantic climax: everything else leads up to or away from this brief interlude of pure felicity. Visually as well as emotionally and melodically, it must stand apart from all else, not drably merge with it.

There is one further scene calling for natural surroundings: the Volga banks. Káťa, in a state of exaltation, bids farewell first to her lover, then to life itself. She imagines the flowers that will grow and birds that will sing on her grave, and jumps into the river. We need this riparian idyll in ironic contrast to the grim events, just as, prior to that, we need the wordless chorus issuing from the Volga, luring the heroine to her watery death. None of that *chez* Miller. The scene, which in Ostrovsky's play *The Storm*, on which the opera is based, is even more explicitly set in a Volga-side town, one of those strongholds of the brutish merchant class typified by the Kabanovs, no longer features anything resembling a river. The wordless chorus could just as well be issuing from a passing hurdy-gurdy, and Káťa might be jumping, for all we can see, into a ditch or urban gutter.

Even Miller's blocking is perniciously wrongheaded. When Káťa's husband, the ineffectual Tikhon, is being sent on a business trip by his domineering mother, the despotic widow Kabanikha, she orders the household to foregather and witness the

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humiliating obeisances and promises she extracts from the hapless spouses. By keeping all the others upstage left and Káťa downstage right, Miller not only hides much from full view, but also forfeits the sense of encirclement Káťa, at bay, must feel. Lost in the shuffle, too, is the moment of silent, pre-voyage prayer, a pious observance Kabanikha fraudulently imposes, while defying the laws of God and man.

Things go even more off at the opera's terrifying end. Kabanikha has just caused Káťa's suicide and aroused Tikhon's belated rebellion and accusations. What does she do? She merely turns toward the foregathered townsfolk and "bowing in all directions," as the stage directions state, says "Thank you, thank you, good people, for your good offices." This line is also in Ostrovsky, but he follows it up with Tikhon lamenting his loss over Káťa's prostrate body. Janáček omits this, ending instead with the chilling irony of the old woman, unconcerned with anything else, coolly trying to put a good face on a scandal.

How does Miller stage this? He has an unbowing Kabanikha turn to the audience to deliver the closing line. If this is meant to involve us as guilty parties, it is neither appropriate nor effective. No attack on humanity is intended, merely a display of the inhumanity of a specific class through a typical representative. Lost is the bitter irony of a crone unmoved by pity or remorse, concerned only with keeping up appearances. Do reviewers voice their disapproval? Do audiences rise in protest? Vain hopes. Miller goes on being praised and rehired to wreak further egomaniacal destruction.

But, then, no one seems to know any better, not even the translators who add their own incompetence. Thus at the final parting of Káťa and Boris, Janáček has the weak-kneed lover exclaim, "Svedl nás bůh!" —God has led us astray—a daring line not in Ostrovsky. In most translations, as at the Met, we get something like "It was God's will," ignoring the difference between *vedl* (led) and *svedl* (misled), thereby losing the implication that all is not right in heaven. It certainly isn't on earth, where *Káťa Kabanová* falls into the hands of someone worse than an idiot savant: a *savant idiot*, who surely knows better, yet deliberately takes inane liberties.

—John Simon

Roméo et Juliette, by Charles Gounod, at the Lyric Opera of Chicago

The wintry blasts that began this annum made one more receptive than might otherwise be the case to Charles Gounod's melodious but problematic opera *Roméo et Juliette*. The Lyric Opera's run of this sprawling Shakespeare adaptation was undeniably enhanced by the much anticipated Chicago debut of the operatic couple of the moment, Roberto Alagna and Angela Gheorghiu.

It sometimes seems that today's opera world, while bounteous in vocal talent, is barren of the larger-than-life Callas-like figures that grab the musical public's imagination. With the frenzy over Cecilia Bartoli having cooled and the hoary predictability and faux spontaneity of the "Three Tenors" international road show grown more stale and less credible than presidential statements of contrition, the real-life romantic tale of Alagna and Gheorghiu appears to have seized opera mavens' mercurial fancies. Indeed, the details of the courtship of the French-born tenor (of Sicilian lineage) and the Romanian soprano, culminating in a marriage ceremony backstage at the Met performed by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani—presumably minus city fees—were gobbled up greedily by opera fans and the general public alike.

Of course, such over-the-top adulation engenders an equally over-the-top reaction, and the New York press has been rife with tales of diva and divo temperament, most notably regarding the couple's caviling and ultimate withdrawal from last fall's Met production of *La Traviata*. In fairness, judging by the reviews of the Zeffirelli

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production, what has been criticized as a fit of outsize ego deportment seems more like an exercise of judicious artistic discretion. If the rapidly ascending duo-star of Alagna and Gheorghiu allows the singers the clout to decline to embarrass themselves in ill-conceived productions, who can argue?

Time has not been kind to Charles Gounod's legacy. *Faust*, once the most performed opera in the repertory, has now achieved a kind of antiquarian patina, something to be dusted off and presented as a curio of a long-ago era. *Roméo et Juliette* has fared even worse, hampered by structural flaws and dry patches that make *Faust* seem like a work of Mozartean perfection. Apart from Juliette's waltz song, the score remains unbeloved, hindered by a lack of dramatic impetus and by casting difficulties. The Lyric's only previous production took place in 1981 with Alfredo Kraus and Mirella Freni, which must have recalled for some the 1936 film of Shakespeare's fable with Leslie Howard, the only Romeo in memory with a receding hairline. A production every couple of decades seems just about right, for despite an abundance of attractive, yet strangely unmemorable, melody, *Roméo et Juliette* is a dramatically inert work, and, even with high-caliber singers, Gounod's "love duet with interruptions" remains one of the dullest operas in the canon.

Alagna and Gheorghiu are undeniably attractive personages with superb voices and great stage presence, and it was their artistry that elevated the Lyric's solid, mostly traditional production above the work's flaws. Now that the "Fourth Tenor" silliness is behind him, one can simply enjoy the splendid timbre and luscious tone of Alagna's instrument. Despite the persistent criticisms of his forcing his voice, the night I heard him Alagna sang easily and with little evident strain. Roméo's ardent hymn to Juliette as the sun was beautifully rendered, shaded with delicately floated soft notes. Alagna also brought the impetuosity and passion of youth to his role, at one point running and sliding across the Lyric's wide stage to his beloved.

Though possessing the more ample voice and firmer technique, at times Gheorghiu seemed to be—no pun intended—husbanding her resources and keeping her larger voice down in duets. Perhaps the Romanian singer's rich and mellow soprano lies a little low for the role—"Je veux vivre" seemed less a girlish outburst of joy than a considered negotiation through the notes, with some agility lacking at the top of her range. Yet apart from that quibble, she was in superb voice and played beautifully off Alagna. The singers' naturalness together in their duets and graceful acting was affecting and usually convincing. The powerful final scene was most compelling, the straining of the lovers, unsuccessfully, for a final kiss making for a riveting coda. René Pape was a solemn, intriguingly ambivalent Friar Laurence and Jeffrey Wells a sonorous, dignified Capulet. As Mercutio, Brian Montgomery's Queen Mab solo was not as lightly articulated as one would like, but he provided a solid and dashing presence. Patricia Risley as Stephano was a fetchingly long-legged page, great in tights, and her brief song made a charming interlude rather than the irrelevant interruption it usually seems.

The Nicolas Joël-Arnaud Bernard production was an uneasy mix of traditional influences and half-hearted modernisms—the frozen figures holding short swords aloft during the prelude were clearly inspired by the original staging of "West Side Story," a bit of circular influence stealing back upon itself, not entirely successfully. Duane Schuler's usual subtly brilliant lighting did its best to cover Carlo Tommasi's slablike revolving sets, which ranged from plain to plain ugly; the hideous Vegas-motel pink diamond decor of Juliette's room recalls Oscar Wilde's supposed final words —"Either that wallpaper goes or I do." John Nelson—arguably the most underrated American conductor currently before the public—led the Lyric orchestra and chorus with his usual apt blend of sensitivity, intelligence, and vigor.

—Lawrence A. Johnson

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The media

The throne of self-importance

by James Bowman

One of the great emblematic moments in what must inevitably be called postmodern journalism came last month when, having published an anonymously sourced report that Kenneth Starr was considering indicting President Clinton, *The New York Times* then proceeded to editorialize against the Independent Counsel—for leaking! "But . . . But . . . ," we stammer, "he leaked (if he leaked) to you. You published the leak. If you thought this was, in the words of the editorial, an 'apparent effort from the office of Kenneth Starr . . . to spark a debate over criminal prosecution of the President at a time when the Senate deserves a calm decision-making atmosphere and an open field for negotiation' and that, further, such an effort was deplorable, why did you, *The New York Times*, the world's schoolmistress in political ethics, make yourself complicit in it? If it was wrong or injudicious for the thing to be done, how can the *Times* ignore its own essential part in the doing of it?"

Needless to say, the *Times* does not ask itself any of these questions. And indeed we must suppose that it is scarcely able to conceive of them, given the bedrock assumption of postmodern journalism that right and wrong do not apply to journalists where they might interfere with the getting or publishing of a story. The only moral absolutes are that every story must be published and every source protected. "The issue of who leaked news of Mr. Starr's indictment research to *The New York Times* is a phony one," solemnly says *The New York Times*. "What is needed here is not an investigation of journalistic sources, but attention to the substance of Mr. Starr's legal mischief. It seems designed to disrupt these solemn deliberations into Presidential misconduct of a serious if undeniably sordid kind." But if that is true, does not the *Times*'s role in assisting this design amount to the journalistic equivalent of entrapment? At the very least, the newspaper is an accessory to the crime, an equal partner in the evil that Starr is said to have done, since he could not have done it without the newspaper. If he is guilty, the *Times* is equally guilty.

This intransigent moral datum makes the ironies of the editorialist's attack on the Independent Counsel particularly rich. "Mr. Starr," he (or, possibly, she) writes, "is already regarded by his critics as an obsessive personality. Now he seems determined to write himself into the history books as a narcissistic legal crank." A narcissist, you understand, is someone who is passionately in love with himself. I leave it to the discerning reader to decide which of these two cases is better described by the term "narcissistic." Is it that of Mr. Starr, who confided a private thought to an "associate" who then, with or without his knowledge, disclosed this confidence to *The New York Times*? Or is it that of the *Times* herself, so in love with the sound of her own journalistic voice that she eagerly published

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something she thought (or claims to think) would have a pernicious effect, made money by doing so, and then proceeded to abuse the sources of her information for, in effect, forcing her to publish it merely by the disclosure? Than the latter case, it is scarcely possible to imagine self-righteousness carried to greater heights.

That no one (until now) has bothered to notice such monumental self-conceit is a result, I suppose, of our being used to it. It is only what we have come to expect from American journalism. Under these circumstances, I suppose we should count ourselves lucky that the malefactions of Bill Clinton are not among those that the media are inclined to take very seriously. If he had been guilty of, say, uttering a racial epithet, or if he had been a Republican (as the more discerning among progressive-minded thinkers, such as Christopher Hitchens, realize he essentially is), we should all have had to endure an outpouring of heroic smugness the likes of which has not been seen since the Watergate affair. Watergate established the reigning romantic paradigm of the virtuously inquisitorial journalist in brave pursuit of the corrupt wielders of power. But now that the wielders of power are at least nominally in tune with the political opinions of journalists themselves, we are seeing a slight shift in this paradigm.

Now, instead of the crusading prosecutors of their own imaginations, journalists are beginning to fancy themselves as wise and far-seeing judges. Here is an example of the newer sort of journalistic sensibility as it appeared in a piece by Ruth Marcus in *The Washington Post*:

> In the five months since independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr's report triggered the impeachment proceedings against President Clinton, the facts have been endlessly rehashed, the gaps in the evidence stitched together and picked apart, the Constitution's framers invoked to endorse both prosecution and defense.
>
> Yet the essential riddle presented by the charges against Clinton remains: The House managers offer the Senate a perjury case that is at its most compelling when it is also most trivial, and an obstruction case that portrays the president in a disturbing light but is ultimately founded on dueling accounts and disputed inferences.
>
> So it went yesterday in the closing hours of the case, as both sides presented their final arguments in one of the strangest legal proceedings in the annals of American law, a trial by video snippets that was all argument and no new evidence.

This is sheer mystification. The facts had not been endlessly rehashed (except, of course, by prurient-minded journalists) because they were not in dispute, or were hardly in dispute. What was in dispute was, first, whether what Clinton acknowledged having done could be described by such hard and consequential words as "perjury" or "obstruction of justice" and, second, even if it could, whether such perjuries and obstructions amounted to the "high crimes and misdemeanors" constitutionally stipulated as the requirements for removing a president from office. There was no "riddle" about any of this, but the pretense was necessary for Miss Marcus to maintain the imposture that there was an essential equality between the two sides.

From the beginning of this scandal, the White House has cleverly appealed to the self-importance of journalists in order to keep up the illusion that it has had a "side" in the matter that amounted to anything more than arrant sophistry and laughable disingenuousness. Thus the journalist's job of putting into some real-world perspective the pomp and bluster of power was left to the late-night comedians while serious reporters, seeing their much vaunted "objectivity" at stake, felt constrained from applying to it even a modicum of common sense. Miss Marcus, for instance, finds the "disturbing" evidence of obstruction somehow qualified by the unsurprising fact that it was answered by (not "founded upon") "dueling accounts and disputed inferences."

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Do tell! Of what legal process can that not be said?

Yet Clinton throughout the scandal was able to rely on the fact that the mere presence of "dispute" created in the very high minds of our journalistic justicers a prima facie case that the evidence must therefore be somehow dubious or inconclusive—or at any rate that it would be unseemly and injudicious of them to say otherwise. In the same way, the mention of "a trial by video snippets" elides the fact that such a trial was enforced by sheer political muscle by one side on the other as a way of limiting its ability to mount an effective case. The bizarrerie of such a proceeding, which Miss Marcus seems to regard as merely gratuitous, was therefore an indication of the strength, not the weakness of the evidence—which of course was not "new" because it had always been pretty conclusive as to the matters of fact. But once again, the judicial pose, the refusal to take sides very much benefitted one side, the weaker side, over the other.

The pose of judicial neutrality, one consequence of the journalistic profession's self-importance, was also what lay behind the stress given throughout the impeachment trial by the media to the theme, mentioned in this space last month, of "partisanship" (bad) and "bipartisanship" (good). In *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, indeed, coverage of the trial was often dominated by those two papers' search for and heralding of the Senate's latest heroes of bipartisanship. By this term, of course, you will understand concessions made by the Republican majority to the Democratic minority and not the other way round. On the rare occasion when a Democrat joined with Republicans, as when Senator Russ Feingold voted with them on the question of witnesses, he was not given the hero treatment. Wavering Republicans, however, or just those who craved a place in the limelight, found it relatively easy to be lionized for a day at least.

Even Strom Thurmond managed it. "The senior senator from South Carolina," wrote David Von Drehle in the *Post*,

> indeed, the senior senator from the known universe—has dazzled observers of the impeachment trial of President Clinton. Republican Strom Thurmond has been in his seat, back straight, eyes clear, for every minute of every day. Very few senators can match that claim, and none of them is 96 years old.
>
> He has done it without complaint. But there came a moment yesterday when that endurance and fortitude seemed to reach its breaking point. Thurmond finally cried out.
>
> "*Nooooo!*"
>
> He was on his feet. His jaw was set defiantly. His fists tensed at his sides. Strom Thurmond was voting a most emphatic no.

And a lot more of the same kind of guff, all inspired by Thurmond's somewhat surprising decision to join with twenty-five other Republicans and all Democrats to decline to hear live testimony from Miss Lewinsky. Hardly worth all this perfervid dramatization, you might think. But in The Story as told to us by Von Drehle and others of the trial as the struggle of emerging bipartisanship to overcome the fanaticism and zealotry of the Republican prosecutors, it was a hugely important event.

One of the heroes of bipartisanship, however, briefly looked as if he might turn apostate. Poor Senator Byrd didn't know what to think. At first he was just a bit of color in the "Trial Journal" kept by Mr. Von Drehle. "Their stamina was remarkable," he wrote of the Senators as the trial began. "In some strange way, it seemed the older they were, the more dazzling their endurance. Senator Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.), 81, scarcely shifted in his seat all day. Resplendent in a creamy waistcoat under his dun-colored suit, his shock of white hair spilling across his head like a comber on a storm-tossed sea, Byrd seemed less a man than the most lifelike oil-on-canvas you ever saw." It's not much of a distinction, you might think, to sit still and look like an oil painting, but I suppose you could see remaining

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unmoved as a stage on the road to bipartisanship. At least in Byrd's case it seemed to be so, since he piped up half way through the trial to propose that the charges against the president be dismissed. All of a sudden, he was the man of the hour. As Guy Guigliotta wrote in *The Washington Post*:

> If any other Democrat but Sen. Robert C. Byrd (W.Va.) had called for dismissal of the impeachment case against President Clinton, Republicans would have rejected the move as nothing but impotent partisan grandstanding.
>
> But Byrd, as every one of his colleagues understands, is the soul of the U.S. Senate, a dapper, white-maned patriarch who is the recognized authority on subjects from chamber decorum and the line-item veto to impeachment.
>
> So when he speaks, it is not a partisan whisper, but a thunderclap. And when he made his announcement yesterday, it was widely interpreted as a clear sign that the Senate's appetite for impeachment may be evaporating.

And so forth and so on, down to the very predictable hagiography: "Byrd, now 81, the self-educated son of a West Virginia coal miner, has been in the Senate since 1959. He has served as minority leader, majority leader, president pro tempore, and chairman of the Senate Appropriations committee." Among his many accomplishments, we learn from Mr. Gugliotta, "He has written a four volume history of the Senate, can recite the names of all the kings of England dating from Cerdic (A.D. 519–534) and used to entertain his colleagues with Appalachian favorites played on a country fiddle."

This paragon of statesmanship, learning, and musicianship instantly succeeded former Senator Bumpers, who had been the media's paragon of statesmanship and oratory for the day before. As Mr. Von Drehle wrote on that occasion,

> This was just the way Hollywood would do it: After more than a week of lawyerly tedium, here was Dale L. Bumpers, a former senator direct from Central Casting, with Lincolnesque features and enviable gray hair. Straight as a ramrod despite seventy-three years, his voice a deep Ozarks blend of honey and tang, like a good barbecue sauce.
>
> Having given twenty-four years of service, he'd recently stepped gracefully into retirement. But now, fearing for the Republic as he concluded the opening statements in the president's defense against the Articles of Impeachment, he was back to implore his colleagues—the "friends and honorable men" of the Senate—to stop.

Interestingly, both paragons took the same position on the question of impeachment, namely that they were agin it. For some reason there seemed a paucity of "white-maned patriarchs" and "Lincolnesque features" on the other side, though Henry Hyde was certainly white-haired and hailed from Illinois.

But when Byrd's motion to dismiss failed on a (nearly) party line vote, the patriarch who looked like an oil painting attended to the proceedings and was moved. Forsaking for the moment both statesmanship and bipartisanship he found, no doubt as much to his own surprise as to the media's, that there could be no doubt of the president's culpability of, precisely, "high crimes and misdemeanors." When he said so in an interview with Cokie Roberts broadcast on ABC's "This Week," George Stephanopoulos cited it as an example of the Senator's confusion and inconsistency. His colleagues, Bill Kristol and George Will, gently pointed out to Stephanopoulos another, admittedly outlandish possibility: perhaps Byrd had listened to the evidence and found it compelling!

Such a reversal, you might have thought, would be at least as big a story as the Senator's knowledge of all the kings of England since Cerdic (A.D. 519–534), but it received scarcely any play in the media. Suddenly the white-maned patriarch and his country fiddle were forgot. Part of the reason was doubtless that, under questioning by Mrs. Roberts, Byrd would not com-

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mit himself to voting for conviction—even though he admitted the president was guilty and, in a major deviation from the Democratic party line, that his crimes did "rise to the level of impeachment" after all. He just wasn't sure that a vote for conviction was in the national interest. But was that not itself reason for a few headlines and perhaps even for a bit of Von Drehle's florid prose? "The soul of the Senate" was publicly proposing that the World's Greatest Deliberative Body should, like the O. J. Simpson jury, acquit the president by what amounted to jury nullification.

But no one was much interested by this point. *The New York Times* headline that day claimed that "3 Witnesses Provide No Breakthrough, Disappointing Hopes for High Drama." It was a revealing formulation—like the one on CBS radio news next day which told us that "hopes were fading" for open deliberations by the Senate. Whose hopes? I certainly had no hopes either for "high drama" or for open deliberations. Whatever hopes I had in the matter were all on the other side. But the media, of course, had very considerable hopes of both. The rejection of open deliberations they couldn't do much about, but, disappointed of the drama, they undertook to make up the deficiency themselves—by continuing to look for "white-maned patriarchs" and "Lincolnesque features" pitiably crying out to their colleagues for bipartisanship—so long as it was bipartisanship in acquittal.

It seems, that is, never to have occurred to these editorial impresarios that they were looking for drama in the wrong places. The charges of "partisanship" which greeted every instance of Republican unwillingness to vote with Democrats fell curiously silent in the face of Senator Byrd's stunning and, one might have thought, even dramatic confession of doubt in the president's essential innocence. Was this too, perhaps, bipartisanship, albeit of an obviously perverse kind? Or was it a lapse by the white-maned patriarch into a new kind of partisanship? The press's inability to classify it in terms of the drama it had already long since cast and put on the stage—the drama, that is, of The Perils of Bipartisanship in Seeking to Save Mr. Clinton (our Bipartisan President) from the Republican Zealots—is presumably at least part of the reason why Senator Byrd's declaration did not qualify as drama.

To be fair, the Senator himself seemed to want to downplay the dramatic impact of his announcement by leaving open the question of his vote—though it was also possible that he never intended to vote for conviction but wanted to throw a scare into the White House by announcing that he thought such a vote would be justified on the merits of the case. My God! they must have thought. Could their own partisan wall be cracking? No, not really. But, given the probable lack of opportunity for the Senate to vote on a motion of censure, this was as near as the Soul of the Senate could get to putting on record his sense of disgust at having to do his partisan duty. "He [Clinton] will not escape the judgment of history," said the Senator to Mrs. Roberts. "People a hundred years from now will be talking about this." An historian himself, Byrd then added that "I am not going to be at all light in my excoriation of William Jefferson Clinton."

That must have had the White House spinners quaking in their boots! It was a sad indication of the sense of self-importance that must come with being called a white-maned patriarch a few too many times. But then Senators are naturally self-important. That's why it is the job of the media to puncture that self-importance instead of contributing to it. But, alas, that becomes pretty hard to do when you are looking down at the U.S. Senate, as the media are in America today, from your own throne of self-importance a long, long way above.

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Books

After the fall

by Carl Rollyson

Ex-Friends is volume three, so to speak, of Norman Podhoretz's voyage through and out of the world of the New York intellectuals—or "the Family," as he prefers to call them.[1] Podhoretz did not realize that he was on the road to apostasy when his 1968 memoir, *Making It*, fomented so much controversy. What caused so much fuss? Well, the book revealed a young man's ambition, his lust for power, his straining ego—the stuff of novels, not of a serious intellectual who should be concerned not with his position but with principles and ideas. Podhoretz put his personality forward, fusing it with the campaign for literary success shared by a whole generation of writers.

But wasn't 1968 rather late in the day to be outraged by a New York critic's confessions? What dirty secrets did he reveal? The greatest poets of the day, starting with Robert Lowell and his *Life Studies* (1959), were adopting the autobiographical approach. And Norman Mailer had paved the way for literary self-revelation and aggrandizement with *Advertisements for Myself* (1959). Certainly these forays into the confessional had their critics, but for the more advanced literati (nearly all of them on the Left) *Making It* could hardly have come as a shock—except it did.

The mystery deepens. Podhoretz showed an advance copy of *Making It* to Mailer, a friend, who praised it highly. Of course, Podhoretz meant to be provocative. His conception of the intellectual required a style that roiled readers. But the realization that his book could be regarded as shameful or as demeaning to the literary/intellectual world that nurtured him proved quite a blow, as he watched allies like Mailer—who withdrew his endorsement—back away from the book.

Podhoretz chronicled his disenchantment with the Family in volume two of his voyage, *Breaking Ranks* (1979), another brave book that exposed the bankruptcy of the Left and its literary and political projects. He attacked the hypocrisy and hegemony of a group which deplored American power even as its members jockeyed for position, their hostility to Podhoretz a product not merely of his shift to the Right but of his all-too-knowing rejection of their values. If their animosity towards him seems out of proportion it is because as a member of the Family, coming under its protection and encouragement, contributing to its health and influence, turning on it made Podhoretz, in the Family's view, an ingrate and an apostate.

The target had to be Podhoretz, not Mailer, for example, who, because of his quirky politics, never fit neatly into the Family anyway. Mailer could be shunned when necessary but never really ostracized,

1 *Ex-Friends: Falling Out with Allen Ginsberg, Lionel and Diana Trilling, Lillian Hellman, Hannah Arendt, and Norman Mailer*, by Norman Podhoretz; The Free Press, 256 pages, $25.

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for he occupied several positions at once: he was, as he called himself, a "left-conservative." Depending on Mailer's mood and the intellectual fashion of the day, he could be seated just about anywhere. Not so Norman Podhoretz. He took positions and did not waffle. He could change his mind, of course, if persuaded by an argument better than his own. Thus Hannah Arendt invited him to her apartment and spent over five hours trying to get him to withdraw his criticism of her famous argument about Eichman and the "banality of evil."

Even more curious is the crusade by Allen Ginsberg, not a true member of the Family, to convince Podhoretz of the beauties of the Beats. The two had been first connected as students at Columbia. As editor of *The Columbia Review*, Ginsberg had printed one of Podhoretz's poems. But the critic had never warmed up to what he considered the "know-nothing," anti-intellectual Beats. Ginsberg invited Podhoretz to a consciousness raising session with Jack Kerouac, but the treatment simply did not take. The Ginsberg chapter in *Ex-Friends* is worth quoting from because it stunningly documents both Podhoretz's argument that the Family never forgave him, and his contention that it also never stopped trying to reclaim their bad boy. Here is Ginsberg in an interview from 1987, simultaneously condemning and courting Podhoretz:

> So then . . . Norman realized that . . . he wasn't [a poet]. So he had to go some different way for power, and he got very perverse thoughts and started taking revenge on poetry power. . . . Gee, good old Norman, we went to college together. . . . And why hate him? He's part of my world . . . But did I ever really hate him or was I just sort of fascinated by him? . . . In fact, he's more honest than I am because he attacks me openly. So I should really respect him as one of the sacred personae in the drama of my own transitory experience.

The words practically leap off the page: "So he had to go some different way for power." In the same interview, Ginsberg called Podhoretz his opposite—but in a very special sense: the dirty secret that Podhoretz began to reveal in *Making It* was just how much Leftist intellectuals cared about power, power per se. Ginsberg accused Podhoretz of grasping for the very thing he too wanted, and it took Ginsberg decades to admit—albeit in a roundabout way—that what revolted him about his old friend was Podhoretz's very public pronouncements about the necessity, even the desirability, of power. And then what really clinched matters was Podhoretz's support for Ronald Reagan, who was unembarrassed by the need to exercise American might. Because the American Left—literary and otherwise—never candidly confronted the nature and uses of power, Podhoretz felt he had no choice but to move toward the Right. Of course, conservatives did not always use power wisely but at least they were not ashamed about our democracy's need for an arsenal. How could Podhoretz remain friends with literary power brokers who acted as though only those outside their realm were concerned about power?

As a student at Columbia, shepherded by the fastidious Lionel Trilling, a literary critic possessed of the most measured cadences, the young Podhoretz was startled by his mentor's question: What kind of power was he after? Podhoretz remembers piously replying that he "had no interest in power at all." Trilling scoffed: "Don't be silly, everyone wants power. The only question is what kind. What kind do you want?" This is the crux for Podhoretz: "*Making It* was an extended answer to that question which at the same time explored the reasons the whole issue had become the same kind of 'dirty little secret' that sex had been to the Victorians." Trilling taught Podhoretz that both ambition and honesty were admirable values. A faithful student, Podhoretz, more than any other disciple, took his master's teaching to heart.

Podhoretz does not write as a self-pitying victim or as a moral exemplar pronouncing anathema on his former friends. He regrets,

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rather, that they were not more open about their motivations; he is amazed when one of them, Allen Ginsberg, indulges in moments of candor. What saddens Podhoretz is that the Left did not strengthen the elements within itself that fought against Stalinism and fellow traveling. Vietnam, in Podhoretz's view, is an especially sad episode in the history of the Left because the Family adopted a view that promoted moral equivalency between America and the Soviet Union—and worse—and attacked the U.S. for perpetrating some special kind of evil.

Ronald Reagan, Podhoretz points out, not only started out on the Left, he also served as a union president who battled Communists firsthand, experiencing real-world encounters that many intellectuals on the Left could never have. Reagan could sound simplistic, Podhoretz readily admits, but he had a grasp of power and of institutions that members of the Family and of the Left sorely lacked. He compares Reagan to Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign secretary and former union leader. In 1945, Bevin was asked about his trip to Potsdam to negotiate with Stalin. Had it been difficult? "No," Bevin answered, "I know those Russians; they're just like the Communists." Reagan, responding to a concern that perhaps he trusted Gorbachev too much, said: "Oh, don't worry about that. I still have the scars on my back that I got fighting the Communists back in Hollywood."

Podhoretz still has his own scars, of course, and he cannot find it in himself to be as affable as the truly remarkable Ronald Reagan. Yet he has good things to say about his ex-friends, many of whom he still holds in tender regard. The relationship was never easy with Ginsberg, yet Podhoretz speaks well of some of his early work and of his great facility as a poet. Lionel Trilling remains a revered figure, and even the tetchy Diana Trilling gets grudging respect for her often passionate involvement with Podhoretz's early career.

Perhaps the biggest surprise of the book is Lillian Hellman. She is an unlikely object of affection. When Podhoretz first met her at the Trillings', he knew she was a Stalinist and wondered why she was there. The Trillings had defended Whittaker Chambers, and, in addition, Hellman was precisely the kind of middlebrow playwright the Family scorned. But Hellman was a charmer and a master manipulator. She understood all about power. She could fill a room with her sexy, flirtatious personality. She had approached Lionel and Diana, wanting to know them better, implying they should make amends for the political differences that kept them apart. (I know from interviewing Diana Trilling that Hellman bowled her over, that she seemed, at first, exactly the kind of big personality that Diana had been searching for all her life.)

With Podhoretz, timing was everything. Hellman's overtures to those on the anti-Stalinist Left came just as Khrushchev was attacking Stalin, when it seemed that perhaps Communism could reform itself from within. Perhaps there could be a new Lillian Hellman, too, and she could rewrite history in a series of memoirs largely skirting her own sorry political record until, that is, the publication of her third volume of memoirs, *Scoundrel Time* (1976), when Hellman's overweening pride and sense of power overrode her tactical sense. She attacked the Trillings and *Partisan Review* (bastion of the Family) for not fighting McCarthyism or defending those like herself who found themselves testifying before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Although Podhoretz says he was never taken in by her memoirs, which he deemed written in a degraded Hemingwayese, he certainly fell for Hellman's charm and admits that he still misses his "playmate."

For all his criticism of the Family, Podhoretz has written an elegy for its demise. He deplores the current state of the intellectual world, which is dominated by careerist academics mouthing execrable jargon. The Family, however, was a vibrant community of intellectuals who honed their skills by speaking to a literate but general audience. They promoted as many bad ideas

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as good ones, he avows, yet "without such a community, we lack a center around which we can gather and in which, whether through collaboration or competition, agreement or dissension, we can deepen and refine our thinking." Such sentences honor a lost kingdom of the intellect, one in which Podhoretz journeyed as a collaborator, competitor, and, finally, a dissenter. "I miss my ex-friends," he says simply, "[their] major passion in life was ideas and the arts, and [they] could get just as wrought up in an argument over the work of a novelist or painter as they could about political ideologies. And what made the Family special for me in particular was the regular contact I had with it." We are now without such a Family, and it is the moving distinction of Podhoretz's memoir that he makes us feel his loss as our own.

We'll always have Paris

Alex Karmel A Corner in the Marais: Memoir of a Paris Neighborhood. David R. Godine, 149 pages, $24.95

reviewed by Renee Winegarten

Today, those of us who walk through the narrow streets and passageways of the historic Marais district in Paris are in all likelihood on our way to the Musée Picasso, housed in the beautifully restored Hôtel Salé. This is a mansion (hôtel) built in 1656 for a rich salt tax farmer—in the ancien régime all tax farmers were of their nature and profession unpopular and well-to-do. Nearby is the Musée Carnavalet, a particular favorite of mine, where one may shudder anew at the document stained with Robespierre's blood from his jaw, broken as he was hurried to the guillotine. It was in a wing of the Carnavalet mansion that Mme. de Sévigné, brilliant observer of society in the reign of Louis XIV, resided for nearly twenty years. Consummate letter writer at a time when the letter was a valued literary genre, she was born in the Marais, in the family house in the Place Royale in 1626, and was married in the church of Saint-Gervais-Saint-Protais only a stone's throw away. Her loyalty to friends who were in political disgrace was one of her many attractive qualities. At the very heart of the *quartier* so familiar to her there shines the symmetrical grace of the Place Royale—known today as the Place des Vosges—completed in 1612. In this square, too, stands the house (now a museum) where Victor Hugo lived before he went into exile.

The author of *A Corner in the Marais*, the American novelist Alex Karmel, has occupied with his French wife a pied-à-terre in this district since 1982. Their small, modernized apartment lies at the top of an old house on the corner of the rue Vieille-du-Temple and the rue des Rosiers (itself famous as the once bustling hub of the Jewish area). To reach their flat they have to climb a narrow winding staircase with picturesque wooden beams—illustrated in this delightful book along with other architectural curiosities of the neighborhood. Alex Karmel has known and loved Paris since he first saw it (like myself) from the train on the gray approaches to the Gare du Nord. In his case, that was in 1949, at the height of the doom and gloom of the existentialist period. He has had the excellent idea of researching the history of the house and the lives of its inhabitants, however obscure or "anonymous" they may be. To satisfy his intense and fruitful curiosity he has also inquired into the fascinating background of the Marais itself.

In the Middle Ages, a part of the Marais (the marshland or swamp) served as a kitchen garden for the Knights Templar, those mysterious powerful figures who play such a large part in nineteenth-century and twentieth-century conspiracy theories. (See Umberto Eco's playful novel *Foucault's Pendulum* for a contemporary view; or the more solemn, far-fetched bestseller, *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*.) Their presence survives in street names like the rue du Temple and the rue Vieille-du-Temple. Various monarchs resided in the Marais in

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palaces that no longer exist. Though some of the surviving great houses of the nobility—like the hôtel Carnavalet itself—were built in the sixteenth century, not until the seventeenth century did the *quartier* become highly fashionable.

The active center of it was then the Place Royale. It was built by order of the ill-fated reformer Henri IV to serve as a pleasant spot where the inhabitants of Paris could stroll and take their ease after the grim years of the Wars of Religion. This was where people felt they had to go to meet and exchange gossip, to see the latest fashions and to be seen. Sometimes it would also be used for splendid royal ceremonies. Corneille—before his play *Le Cid* made his name and aroused the hostility of Cardinal Richelieu—wrote a bizarre comedy, or rather a comedy with a bizarre anti-hero, entitled *La Place Royale*. It was the company of actors of the Marais who gave the first performance. A contemporary of Corneille's named Claveret, a lawyer like himself, had written a play called *La Place Royale* some years earlier and was consequently extremely annoyed. He said that Corneille's play could have been named after anything, since the Place Royale itself played no significant part in it—which was strictly true. Presumably, Corneille had chosen the title to catch the eye of the public, simply because the square was then such a well-known and frequented meeting place.

Many of the great *hôtels particuliers*, or mansions of the nobility and the wealthy, that survive in the Marais were built or extended in the seventeenth century and have been brilliantly restored. Among them is the very grand Hôtel Sully owned by Henri IV's influential Finance Minister. They are constructed in the characteristically French style "entre cour et jardin," with an enclosed courtyard in front, a carriage entrance on the street, and a garden at the rear. As Alex Karmel observes, this style may seem rather dull at first but its subtle qualities gradually become more apparent.

If the pleasures of reading embrace those that uncover something new and those that recall the reader's own experiences and impressions, Alex Karmel's book does both. How right he is to say that the best time to see the Place des Vosges is on a sharp wintry day—when the bare branches of the trees are dusted with hoarfrost. Like him, I first knew the Marais when it was not the most salubrious district in Paris. Most of it was shabby and decaying and in real danger of destruction. Fortunately, that great mythomaniac and novelist-adventurer André Malraux, then de Gaulle's Minister of Culture, came to the rescue. He inaugurated the policy of protecting districts in their entirety, and by 1964 the preservation of the Marais was guaranteed. Since then, of course, a residence there has become highly desirable.

In its great days in the seventeenth century the Marais was the resort of poets, writers, and wits, as well as nobles, lawyers, and financiers. Here, the cruelly disabled satirical poet and novelist, Pierre Scarron, author of *Le Roman comique*, held court, his beautiful intelligent wife being one of the major attractions. After Scarron's demise, his widow would eventually be transformed into Mme. de Maintenon, the powerful morganatic wife of the Sun King, Louis XIV. In her fascinating and well-researched historical novel, *L'Allée du Roi*, which purports to be the memoirs of Mme. de Maintenon, Françoise Chandernagor has vividly recreated the language of the time and life as it was lived in the Marais in the seventeenth century.

By the eighteenth century, though, the Marais was no longer the height of fashion, and many members of the aristocracy had moved either west, to the faubourg Saint-Honoré, or south, to the faubourg Saint-Germain on the Left Bank. The aging few who did remain appeared to observers—in the years immediately before the Revolution—as particularly reactionary and narrow minded. However, Alex Karmel has discovered that in 1776 Beaumarchais was living in the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs de Hollande in the rue Vieille-du-Temple.

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Notable year! Beaumarchais, whose activities—watchmaker, musician, speculator, satirist, playwright, diplomat, secret agent, among others—were more multifarious than those of his Figaro, was engaged at the time in gunrunning for the Americans. This was a year after *Le Barbier de Séville* and just before the Declaration of Independence.

In the early nineteenth century, the Marais was still sufficiently respectable for Balzac's family to have a place there at 40 rue du Temple. In the same house lived a dowager who had known Beaumarchais and who talked to Balzac about him. In Balzac's tale *Les Deux Rêves*, the creator of Figaro is made to converse with Marat and Robespierre. During his early struggles the young Balzac occupied a garret in the Marais—doubtless similar to the one "reeking of poverty" that figures in his novel *La Peau de chagrin*. For him, the Marais was simply a backwater. Eventually, it would be left to impoverished members of the aristocracy and to notaries, shopkeepers, and artisans until its modern revival.

Alex Karmel has unearthed the fact that the house in which he has his pied-à-terre is much older than he thought at first and that it dates from the Middle Ages. Through local archives and legal documents he has found that most of its inhabitants were respectable tradespeople, including a pastrycook to the king. More surprising in the records is the presence of that penetrating seventeenth-century artist Philippe de Champaigne, who was pursuing through the courts the recovery of a debt from the heirs of certain tenants. To him we owe the enduring grandiose image of Cardinal Richelieu robed in power, as well as the intensely probing portraits of the austere, vulnerable nuns of the convent of Port-Royal, an institution later to be condemned for Jansenist heresy. It is salutary to be reminded of Philippe de Champaigne's more mundane activities.

Together with a great many others around the world, Alex Karmel cannot help wondering why he loves Paris so much, in spite of the well-known Parisian indifference or even hostility towards foreigners. That withering Parisian irony can be hard to take—especially when one is young. He recalls fondly how, for a while after the 1939–45 war, Paris "remained as if suspended in a pre-war limbo," with many of its streets unchanged since the end of the nineteenth century. Then, of course, a great deal did change. Came the din and the danger of the motorway along the Seine, and the towers of Montparnasse and La Défense altered the skyline forever. The author lists reasons for his devotion to the place—the cuisine, the language, the sheer beauty of the city, and, finally, "there is living with history." I would add, naturally, living with literature. Yet there are other places where one can live with history and literature, but with London, say, these treasures are perhaps more secret or less concentrated. Besides, it cannot be forgotten that many have been drawn to Paris because it was regarded as the center and model of civilized life, taste, and culture from the seventeenth century to the 1939–45 war—maybe even up to the decline of French existentialism. In the end, though, it has to be admitted that, as with any love affair, rationalism yields to imponderables. As Montaigne famously said of his affection for his friend La Boétie, "Because it was he, because it was I."

This charming book, with its stress on human beings, the "ordinary" people overlooked by history as well as some of the gifted, takes its place in the considerable library of works whose non-French authors have been enamored of Paris. I have only one modest complaint: the omission of a modern street map of the Marais (as distinct from the antique map partially reproduced on the endpapers). This would save the reader the time and effort of referring to another source while avidly accompanying the author in his investigations and peregrinations. All the same, this small book, though not intended as a mere guide, will surely prove an extremely agreeable companion to all explorers of the Marais.

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Postponing & deferring

John Lowe The Warden:
A Portrait of John Sparrow.
HarperCollins UK, 258 pages, £19.99

reviewed by Paul Dean

The coincidence of title between this biography and Trollope's novel of 1855 is wholly intentional, and more than a little mischievous. No one could have been less like Mr. Harding, that unworldly cleric who resigned the wardenship of an almshouse, a lucrative sinecure, on a matter of principle, than John Sparrow, who intrigued to obtain the Wardenship of All Souls, Oxford's only college without any undergraduates, and went to pieces after he relinquished it. John Lowe, a long-standing friend of Sparrow's, has had full access to his papers and has written an affectionate but unindulgent portrait, a cautionary tale about the vanity of human wishes as well as an elegy for a now irrecoverable ideal of academic freedom.

Born in 1906 into a wealthy manufacturing family, John Sparrow was the eldest of five children. His father, whom in adult life he could hardly bear to mention, was aloof and cold, his mother adoring but not uncritical. He appears to have been old from an early age, remarking at the age of three when rebuked for some piece of outspokenness, "You mustn't say what you think, but what people like"—a piece of wisdom he largely ignored thereafter. Literary and artistic in nature, a collector of rare books from boyhood, but also a lifelong passionate football fan, he nonetheless had a patchy academic career at prep school and subsequently at Winchester College. He worked only at what interested him, chafing against the concentration on classical studies, which was then a feature of the public school curriculum. Yet, while still a schoolboy, he published editions of Donne's *Devotions* and the poems of Henry King, which attracted favorable reviews in the national press.

Books were Sparrow's passion. His private library, particularly its seventeenth- and eighteenth-century holdings, was world-famous. His four maxims to aspiring collectors were: never lend books, never give them away, never sell them, and never read them. He certainly could not be accused of keeping to the last of these, but cannot be called a scholar in the conventional donnish sense of the word. Despite his dilettante reputation at school, he went up to New College, Oxford, in 1925 to read Greats, which entails the study of the languages, literature, history, and philosophy of classical Greece and Rome. In the second part of this course he studied under Horace Joseph, whose austere intellect and passion for exact statement he relished. Joseph, however, may have been a mixed blessing; Maurice Bowra, a fellow-undergraduate and friend of Sparrow's, later Warden of Wadham College, thought that "he seems likely to crush the poet by turning him into a logician," and Sparrow's approach to poetry always retained a certain naïve literalism. Three months after graduating with the expected First, Sparrow obtained a Prize Fellowship of All Souls by competitive examination, and, still aged only twenty-three, entered that unique institution, which was to become so central to his life.

All Souls was founded in 1483 as a chantry chapel in which prayers were said for the souls of the dead at Agincourt. It is an establishment dedicated purely to research, with no obligation on the Fellows to teach, or even to reside; Fellowships are held for life, and many, including Sparrow until he was elected Warden, pursue other careers while retaining All Souls as a convenient non-London club. Sparrow went to the Chancery Bar and slowly built up a promising legal career, which was interrupted by the War, then resumed until he became Warden in 1952. Lowe's account of the plotting involved in the election recalls, as Sparrow himself recognized, the maneuvering over the Rectorship of Lincoln College by Mark Pattison in the 1850s and 1860s. Pattison, the subject of one of Sparrow's books, told the story of his first, failed

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attempt to be elected in his posthumous *Memoirs* (1885), Sparrow's edition of which remains unpublished. Pattison was, however, a zealous teacher, university reformer, and formidable scholar, while Sparrow remained in some senses a gentleman amateur, completely indifferent to his colleagues' academic achievements, and opposed to any change in the comfortable social routine of the College. The resident Fellows were less sympathetic to him than their non-resident counterparts, but all agreed that, if you wanted a convivial dining companion or stimulating public speaker, Sparrow was your man.

He was Warden for twenty-five years. For half this time he was very happy; the rest was overshadowed by his battles against the attempts of the Franks Commission to modernize Oxford in the mid-1960s. The Commission's report, with a wounding allusion to *Macbeth*, described the practices of All Souls as characterized by "infirmity of purpose." Franks, the Provost of Worcester College, whom Sparrow perceived, in Lowe's phrase, as "a cold bureaucrat," noted that All Souls was sitting on a vast amount of money, while contributing virtually nothing to the communal life of the University. Initially, the Fellows considered admitting graduate students as a concession, a proposal which was later dropped as impractical, owing to restricted space, and replaced by the inauguration of Visiting Fellowships, which still exist. The issue was a fundamental one: did the College exist primarily for teaching or research? For Franks this was a matter of social responsibility, for Sparrow one of intellectual freedom and institutional autonomy. The battle was, to quote *Macbeth* again, "lost and won"; All Souls has managed to resist to this day the clamor for it to be "useful," which is little short of miraculous given the prevailing political-educational climate.

Sparrow was compelled to retire at the age of seventy, moving into a house owned by All Souls. He convinced himself, unnecessarily, that his life was effectively over, and proceeded to make this a self-fulfilling prophecy by increasing his already imprudent consumption of alcohol to epic proportions and causing such squalid scenes that he was eventually banned from dining in the college over which he had once presided. His memory deteriorated and his capacity for work declined; the possibility of a Visiting Professorship at the University of Chicago evaporated after a disastrous trial visit (he had been a success two years earlier). In the last years of his life, the care of a few devoted friends, among them his biographer, eliminated his drink problem and gave him a measure of happiness. He died in 1992, aged eighty-five.

Sparrow was a homosexual, apparently from an early age. He was untroubled about this, but, since homosexual activities were illegal in Britain until 1962, he had to be discreet, and it is difficult to gather evidence of this side of his life; even his mother, his confidante in all else, was excluded here. (He proved an unexpectedly good officer in the War, partly because he could express affection for the men with relative freedom; he kept in touch with many of them for years afterwards.) Sparrow was promiscuous, but Lowe documents one relationship that was more enduring. When he was forty-five, Sparrow fell in love with an undergraduate, and some of his correspondence, quoted here, touchingly shows the romanticism that he often suppressed in himself. "Our foundations," he wrote in 1953, "grow deeper every day: strength and calm, and understanding. On that can be built an endless superstructure of delight and pure joy—and *fun*." This last observation shows the positive side of the immaturity that could otherwise make the middle-aged writer an embarrassing spectacle. He could stand back from his own ardor, mocking his outpourings ("as if I were to empty over you a cup of very strong sweet tea") even while believing them. And, after all, his feelings were returned, and the friendship lasted until the younger man's death in the 1980s (by which time he had married). As Lowe says, there is bizarreness

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in the spectacle of Warden Sparrow passing from the banalities of a committee meeting to the delicious riskiness of penning letters which might have put him in jail had they fallen into the wrong hands. "But," he writes, "John enjoyed deception; he was good at it."

As that comment suggests, there is an occasional astringency in this book, which saves it from being hagiography. Lowe admits that Sparrow could be duplicitous, arrogant and selfish, and is damning about his feckless tenure in the Wardenship.

> He was determined to keep the college as he liked it, without really considering its role for the future, or its contribution to the life of the university or, indeed, the wishes of his colleagues. One can only surmise that John would not be elected Warden today, and I still find it surprising that the college elected him in 1952.

The Fellows did so, it appears, largely to prevent the election of A. L. Rowse. One can see their difficulty.

In his writing, too, Sparrow may have felt a sense of promise unfulfilled. "Quite respectable, don't you think?" he would say in old age to Lowe, surveying the shelf of his own publications. One can hear a note of anxiety in the question. There is an early scholarly book on Virgil, a late one on inscriptions in Renaissance art; a foolishly censorious attack on modernist poetry (about which Bowra, who spoke with authority, wrote him, "You don't know nearly enough"), his study of Mark Pattison's educational thought (the long-projected biography was never written), collections of essays and radio talks, editions of Latin verse, too many vanity publications. One wonders whether he remembered the final report of A. T. P. Williams, his Headmaster at Winchester: "He ought not to be content with any less than a really worthy ambition, for he has the capacity to do much service."

John Sparrow's career and character are of their time, a time now gone forever. Universities, even Oxford, have little room for colorful, wayward personalities, who will not obey the diktats of corporatism. In our monochromatic, conformist world, marked as it is by cowardice and dullness, such characters are as rare as the hippogriff, and, when we have the luck to meet them, exhilarating. Yet they can also be showy, neurotic, inconsiderate, and ultimately wearisome. Some lack the equilibrium, the self-knowledge, or the humility necessary to form stable relationships, to do lasting work, or to be content with their own limitations. They are rarely happy, and when their charm fades their erstwhile friends fall away. That almost happened to John Sparrow, but not quite. He died at peace with himself, and this is an honorable book by one of the few who supported him to the end.

Pretentious & hollow

Martin Amis Heavy Water & Other Stories. Harmony Books, 212 pages, $21

reviewed by Brooke Allen

Martin Amis has built an entire career out of being the smartest smart-ass on the block. For the last quarter-century he has steadily honed his considerable skills and talents until he has become England's coolest, highest-profile writer, and one of its most technically proficient.

He is fiercely intelligent, and the swiftness with which he digs his fangs into the jugular can hardly be matched. But his works are proof that intelligence and wit are not enough; even talent is not enough. Fiction that aspires to be really good must also possess a heart. Without that invaluable commodity an author can be brutish and nasty, but not tragic.

Amis has never been able to overcome an essential heartlessness, and so, gifted as he is, he has not reached the level of contemporaries like Pat Barker or Ian McEwan. An author must love even his most dreadful

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characters to bring them to life; Amis does not. Take, for example, his description of a club bouncer:

> Fat Lol: he provided dramatic proof of the proposition that you are what you eat. Fat Lol was what he ate. More than this, Fat Lol was what he was eating. And he was eating, for his lunch, an English breakfast—Del's All Day Special at £3.25. His mouth was a strip of undercooked bacon, his eyes a mush of egg yolk and tinned tomatoes. His nose was like the end of a lightly grilled pork sausage—then the baked beans of his complexion, the furry mushrooms of his ears. Paradise Street right down to his bum crack—that was Fat Lol. A loaf of fried bread on legs.

Fat Lol is effectively grotesque, but his author never makes him effectively human. The same thing could be said of the better-developed and more complex Mal, Fat Lol's partner and the protagonist of this story, "State of England," the longest and most ambitious in *Heavy Water.* Mal, like Lol, is a bouncer. He has earned enough money to send his son Jet to a trendy school and to keep an Asian mistress as well as a wife; but his accent, attitudes, and lack of couth give him away, and he knows it. Never mind that "class and race and gender were supposedly gone (and other things were supposedly going, like age and beauty and even education); all the really automatic ways people had of telling who was better or worse—they were gone." Gone they may be, but they are not forgotten, as Mal is only too aware.

In many ways Mal is the prototypical Amis-man (the Martin Amis-man, that is, not to be confused with the entirely different but equally recognizable Kingsley Amis-man). He is spiritual brother to John Self of *Money*, Richard Tull of *The Information*, Terry Service of *Success.* An Amis-man experiences not love but a queasy mixture of lust, fear, and need. He fatally confuses pleasure with joy, and has no use whatever for mere contentment. He hankers after status and success, although he is sharp enough to know that they are not, in themselves, sufficient. He is haunted by a feeling that he has taken a fatal misstep, but can't remember where or how, rather like the hero of another story in this volume, "Denton's Death": "It seemed to him that all his life he had been tumbling away from his happiness as a young boy, tumbling away to the insecurity and disappointment of his later years, when gradually, as if through some smug consensus, people stopped liking him and he stopped liking them."

Amis's special strength, one in which he has few peers, is in laying bare the sheer abjectness of the human animal. (Especially the male animal: one of my primary sensations in reading a Martin Amis novel is always one of relief at not having been born a man, with their apparently unappeasable appetite for success and sex.) He does have a point; as a species we are indeed abject, as well as being venal and just generally pathetic. But this is not all we are, and it is not enough to make first-class fiction, despite the claims of sycophantic critics or fellow-writers like Patrick McGrath, who in his *New York Times* review of Amis's recent *Night Train* gushed that "a tone of deep sadness, of grief even, has always been apparent in his work, lending depth and edge to a prose crackling with wit and invention." Actually, the tone always strikes me as being not so much one of grief as nastiness. If it is grief, though, to give it the benefit of the doubt, it is grief without the balancing awareness of joy or beauty that gives grief its impact in fiction.

Heavy Water consists of nine stories, two of which appear here for the first time. As a group they are standard or substandard, and offer no surprises for readers familiar with Amis's fiction. Two of the stories are alternate-world gimmick pieces, along the lines of his 1991 novel *Time's Arrow*, in which time runs backward. In "Career Move" screenplay writers struggle in poverty to get their works published in obscure journals while poets jet back and forth between London and Hollywood, attending top-

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level meetings and screwing starlets. Technically, at least, no one in the world does this sort of thing better than Amis, and while it is strictly a one-joke effort there are plenty of laughs in "Career Move." Here, for instance, is a Hollywood production meeting about a new sonnet: "Now. Don has a problem with the octet's first quatrain, Ron has a problem with the second quatrain, Jack and Jim have a problem with the first quatrain of the sestet, and I think we *all* have a problem with the final couplet."

This is ingenious tomfoolery, and so is "Straight Fiction," in which homosexuality is the social norm and heteros live a furtive, underground life. ("Christ, where do they get off calling themselves straight?" says one of the gay characters. "They take a fine old English word and fuck it up for the rest of us.") This type of gimmick cannot sustain an entire novel, as the abysmal *Time's Arrow* demonstrated, but it works well enough for this sort of lightweight magazine piece.

A couple of stories in this collection do not even have Amis's usually reliable cleverness going for them. The aforementioned "Denton's Death" is a disgustingly pretentious little squib about suicidal depression, while "Let Me Count the Times" is a trite tale about an unimaginative businessman and his carefully calculated sexual escapades. ("Vernon made love to his wife three and a half times a week, and that was all right," it begins.) A sterile character has possibilities, of course, but not when the story is itself as sterile as the character it so condescendingly describes.

Only two of the stories in *Heavy Water* are worth much: "State of England," described above, and "The Coincidence of the Arts." In the latter, an English portrait painter who has flopped in London emigrates to New York in search of greener pastures. Sir Rodney Peel is fortyish, a mediocrity and a wimp. A sexual scavenger, he is "the first on the scene after the big cats had eaten their fill"; socially, he survives by laying on the butter. "He believed in flattery and was always trying to deploy it. But something went wrong with the words: they came out, as his mother would say, just a bit off."

Having spent most of his adult life trying to shed the accent and mannerisms that mark him, in England, as the overbred sissy he is, in New York Rodney hopefully brings them out of mothballs, for Americans are impressed by this sort of thing; he even follows his agent's advice and has cards printed up bearing the tacky legend "Sir Rodney Peel, Baronet." At the same time, he tries to cultivate a veneer of New York cool, though when he attempts a street-guy handshake he looks, as ever, "like someone slowly and painfully learning how to play Paper, Scissors, Stone."

Rodney is the kind of person Amis usually treats ruthlessly; this story, however, rises above the usual by letting the ignoble Rodney eventually behave rather better than we, or he himself, might expect. Alone among the collection, "The Coincidence of the Arts" succeeds in making its hero a human being rather than a marionette.

Still, it is a far from perfect work, for in it Amis indulges in two vices that sit very badly with him but for which he has often displayed a weakness: bathos and sanctimony. In this story he adopts a high moral tone about racism that, and forgive me if I do him an injustice, I find hard to take very seriously. This sort of preachiness in accordance with the received opinions of his generation crops up fairly often in Amis's fiction, and it always seems both perfunctory and insincere.

Possibly it is not. But that it seems so is the fault of the author and the way he uneasily combines a pose of moral uprightness with his trademark nastiness and with a brand of humor that more than one critic has labelled sophomoric. Not that there is anything wrong with sophomoric humor. On the contrary! But it tends to ring hollowly in a story or book with pretensions to being so much more. It is this ill-matched juxtaposition of attitudes that leaves the reader, after *Heavy Water* as after so much of Amis's work, with a distinctly sour taste in the mouth.

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Notebook

Value-free Harvard

by Roman Martinez

Thirty years ago this spring, Harvard members of Students for a Democratic Society seized and occupied University Hall, the home to the administrative offices of the college. Storming the building, they forcibly ejected Harvard deans and demanded that the university abolish its ROTC programs. A battery of tear gas-toting policemen was finally needed to reestablish order.

Today's Harvard is a much more peaceful place. The burning questions of the Sixties have been settled, and students can concern themselves, by and large, with more mundane matters. We give about as much thought to fomenting campus revolution as the radicals of our parents' generation might have given to declaring celibacy and joining the priesthood.

Nonetheless, the current generation of Harvard students has not entirely broken with the past. The legacy of the 1960s lives on not in the restless passion for social upheaval, but rather in the emptiness that remains once traditions have been destroyed and histrionics abandoned for the calm of middle age. Today we reject the rebelliousness of our parents' era, but at the same time we've inherited their aversion to traditional moral standards. Nowhere is this convergence of past and present more readily apparent than in my generation's response to the Clinton scandal.

President Bill Clinton is unquestionably the embodiment of the 1960s. Vietnam protestor, sexual adventurer, and drug experimenter, he represents much of what once went wrong with America. In defeating Bob Dole (not incidentally a sterling representative of the World War II generation), Clinton promised to "build a bridge to the future." Little did we know that he intended to begin construction personally by dallying with the now infamous Monica Lewinsky, a woman twenty-seven years his junior. If Clinton is a representative of his own era, then perhaps Monica is of hers —ambitious, materialistic, and generally unburdened by moral qualms. Their relationship, or, more precisely, my generation's response to it, has been instructive. It has revealed the extent to which the cultural values of the tumultuous 1960s have been passed on and accepted by the Monica generation of the 1990s.

When the presidential scandal first broke last January, the reaction among Harvard students was one of "wait and see." In a public debate on the issue, representatives from the College Democrats urged the campus to avoid a rush to judgment. Fair enough; after all, the facts remained in dispute, and the enormity of Clinton's prevarication had not yet come to light. Though unlikely, hope remained that the evidence would exculpate the president.

But it was not to be. The Starr Report was issued within days of students' September return to Cambridge, and it instantly became a hot topic of conversation. The Out-of-Town Newsstand in Harvard Square

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sold out of the report within hours, Kinko's copy store began selling bound editions coupled with the president's rebuttal, and, once published, the Starr Report leapt to the top of the Harvard Coop's bestseller list. Even those who didn't read the report would soon hear their roommates' and friends' summaries of what were called, euphemistically, "the good parts."

For the distinct minority of conservative students, the report's documentation of a tawdry affair followed by perjury and obstruction of justice constituted an overwhelming case for impeachment. And rightly so. Some on the other side, most notably the columnists for the *Harvard Crimson* who had defended Clinton vocally and unceasingly, were forced to make a rapid about-face. Mirroring those similarly betrayed in the national media, the *Crimson* editorial board called for the president to resign.

But with the exception of these extremes—the conservatives and jilted liberals—no one cared. True, the report was widely read, but usually in the manner of a Danielle Steele novel. Its salacious details were used more to liven up dorm conversations with crude jokes and gossip than to spark a serious examination of the president's fitness to remain in office. The prevailing attitude was, as one editorialist wrote in the *Crimson*, that "Who the president has oral sex, or any kind of sex, with should not be a concern of the American people."

It's really quite remarkable that the questions surrounding the president's character have been so strikingly ignored. But considering history, it shouldn't be surprising. Clinton's generation spawned a revolution in which notions of free love overthrew traditional sexual mores. We, in turn, have grown up in a world where divorce is prevalent, where promiscuity is rampant, and where roughly one-third of all children are born out of wedlock. We've learned, in other words, that sins of the flesh don't really count. For us, casual sex (protected, of course) is just another way of getting some exercise and having a good time—kind of like bowling, but without the shoes.

And today sexual freedom is so important even offenses such as perjury and obstruction of justice can be excused in its name. As Clinton defenders have argued throughout with reference to adultery and lying about sex, "everybody does it." So why, wonders my generation, should the presidential scandal be any big deal?

Unfortunately, however, there's more to our ambivalence toward the Clinton scandal than just an abiding belief in sexual freedom. It's not just the sex that Harvard students are willing to accept, but the lying, the obstruction of justice, and the reticence of the nation's politicians to do anything other than pander to the polls. The very notion of truth, of a clear distinction between right and wrong, has been blurred. As a *Crimson* editorialist put it: "Who are we to talk about morality?"

It's almost as if right and wrong have been replaced by a menu of moral values from which we can choose at will, not unlike the way courses are selected during the "shopping period" at the beginning of each semester. And just as no one likes Harvard's required Core Curriculum, students reject the notion of a universal morality decipherable by revelation or reason. Moral relativism—another radical legacy of the 1960s—has triumphed. That right and wrong barely matter is clear in the arguments made about the Clinton affair. Aside from the claims that the president's sex life is irrelevant and that "everybody does it," most students have accepted the idea that the existence of polls calling for Republicans to drop the matter is, in and of itself, sufficient reason to do so.

The Monica generation's casual ambivalence towards truth is probably the most disturbing revelation emerging from the Clinton scandal. But there's more. Contempt and scorn have spread to the few fans of truth who remain—open season has been declared on religious believers. The Clinton lawyers' denunciation of Kenneth Starr and

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his prosecutors as fanatics from the Religious Right has resonated with the Harvard community. It's fitting, therefore, that Sidney Blumenthal's attack on Starr for being a religious "zealot" was launched from the podium of Harvard's Institute of Politics. The campus reaction to this outrage was minimal; the smear provoked only a short article in the *Crimson* and was evidently unworthy of editorial comment. At an anti-impeachment rally last December, the law professor Alan Dershowitz continually—to a rousing chorus of cheers and applause—excoriated Republicans for judging Clinton by religious standards. The exercise of moral judgment might well be the only sin left.

Perhaps my generation's uneasy relationship with moral absolutes, made so clear by the Clinton scandal, can be traced to the ideas presented in Harvard's lecture halls. In his 1952 classic *God and Man at Yale*, William F. Buckley, Jr., proposed that universities teach moral truths to their students; at the height of the Cold War, he was advocating that they take sides in the world struggle between individualism and collectivism. "If and when the menace of Communism is gone," Buckley warned, "other vital battles, at present subordinated, will emerge to the foreground. And the winner must have help from the classroom."

Well, the battle for truth is on, and, alas, the classrooms have been but little help. The humanities and social sciences are infused with postmodernists, ready to deconstruct anyone and anything. (President Clinton would fit in wonderfully with the English Department—full of artful equivocations and with his deconstructionist leanings, he has a rightful claim to being our first postmodern president.) And even those who do advocate truth in the classroom have twisted themselves into moral knots to stand up for the president. The enormously popular professor Michael Sandel, a communitarian political philosopher, went so far as to defend Clinton's lies in *The New Republic*—and by invoking Kant, at that.

The natural sciences, however, are a different story. Virtually no Harvard student has a problem accepting the notion of scientific truth. After all, unlike the moral truths that would underlie criticism of the president, scientific truths are based entirely on empirical evidence. Yet the sciences, perhaps unintentionally, also provide students with the illusion that all truths are empirical, that outside the material realm, truths—moral ones, in particular—do not exist.

Consider Harvard's most popular science class, Human Behavioral Biology. Nicknamed "Sex" by students, the course seeks to provide a scientific understanding of human behavior through an approach mixing biological evolution, anthropology, neuroscience, psychology, and linguistics. The first lecture of the class began with a slide of Bill Clinton, provoking titters from the crowd. His adultery was offered as an example of behavior, soon to be explained as a product of various developmental, functional, mechanistic, and evolutionary causes.

The course was judicious in discounting both strict biological and environmental determinism. But the notion of free will—with its attendant moral responsibilities—was given short shrift. Morality itself was presented as a mere product of evolution, not unlike a human's upright posture or our enhanced capacity for speech. And what of God? As one "Sex" professor put it half-jokingly, "The fossil record isn't much help on that one."

The professors describe their class as "a value-free assessment of human behavior." And so it is—students ultimately learn that conduct such as Clinton's stems from a combination of biological and environmental influences. The "value-free" approach is also applied to the anthropological sections of the course where no real condemnation was made of the violence and rape prevalent in the hunter-gatherer and middle-range societies studied. To the contrary, these cultures were presented not as primitive or backward, but merely different. Fed on a steady "value-free" diet of science and cultural relativism, Harvard students naturally reject the idea of universal truths.

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It's no wonder President Clinton is given a free pass. For students hard-pressed to condemn rape among the Kung San of the Kalahari or murder by the Yanomamo in the highlands of New Guinea, adultery and perjury shouldn't matter much either.

Ever since the early Fall, interest in the Clinton scandal has waned. Few, if any, watched the impeachment hearings, and fewer still paid attention to the ensuing Senate trial. The one exception to this indifference was the rally organized by Dershowitz on December 14, five days before the president was impeached. Hundreds of students were in attendance. One by one, Massachusetts congressmen and Harvard professors rose to the podium to denounce Kenneth Starr and defend President Clinton. At the end of the evening, Dershowitz invited the pop star Carly Simon to the front of the room to lead the crowd in a rendition of "We Shall Overcome."

It was fitting that the evening ended with leftist professors and current Harvard students singing and swaying together, all in defense of an embattled president. Here was the meeting of the Clinton generation, which once challenged traditional notions of sex and morality, and the Monica generation, which has inherited the new attitudes without complaint. The discord and turmoil of the 1960s have given way to a more peaceful time, but that's only because the outsiders, who once had to storm their way into campus buildings, have become insiders—professors, parents, and even presidents. As a result, my generation has a dazzling and superficially liberating array of values from which to pick and choose. Whether we shall, indeed, "overcome" this unfortunate legacy remains to be seen.

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Letters

Franz Kafka

To the Editors:

I have just read Eric Ormsby's review of my translation of Kafka's novel *The Castle* (November 1998). As Mr. Ormsby himself notes, previous notices of my translation, including those by J. M. Coetzee (*The New York Review of Books*) and Robert Alter (*The New Republic*), have been largely positive. Of course, there is little consensus about literary translation—or for that matter about Franz Kafka—so Mr. Ormsby is perfectly entitled to his own preferences. However, he has no right to insinuate that there was "some surreptitious consultation" between J. A. Underwood, translator of a recent British rendering of the same novel, and me. Speaking for myself, I can categorically say that I did not engage in any such consultation. I did not see Underwood's translation—nor even know of its existence—until after mine went to press.

Given the "almost claustrophobic" world of Kafka studies—there I see eye to eye with Ormsby—I am just as surprised as he is that nobody informed me about that new British translation of *The Castle* (published by Penguin U.K. in 1997), especially since I had been in correspondence about my project for several years with fellow-scholars here, in Germany, in Britain, as well as in my native Ireland.

To prevent any further misunderstandings, I should like to clarify a few facts: in 1992 I received the commission to translate *The Castle* from Schocken Books, which owns world rights to Malcolm Pasley's 1982 German critical edition on which my translation is based. In January 1995 I submitted a draft to the publishers. At that time there was still no consensus in literary circles in this country that new translations of Kafka were needed. It was in that context that I wrote an essay for *New Literary History* (Spring 1996) in which I summarized the debate about Kafka translations that has been going on for over three decades in Britain, largely in the pages of the *Times Literary Supplement*, and argued the case for new translations based on the critical editions. Although I regret the rather combative tone of that article, I did have to make a strong case against the Muirs in order to upset the prevailing complacency in this country about the adequacy of the old Kafka translations based on Brod's obsolete editions.

In February 1996 I entered a sample (part of the last chapter) in a competition sponsored by the British Comparative Literature Association and the British Centre for Literary Translation. In the interval between the date I first submitted the manuscript and the fall of 1997, I did some work on the manuscript, partly in consultation with freelance editor Melanie Richter-Bernburg, who vetted the translation for accuracy. The book was finally published in March 1998.

My guess is that any existing parallels between the two translations are coincidental and simply reflect the rather obvious fact that Mr. Underwood and I were translating the same novel in the 1990s.

Mark Harman
Millersville, Pennsylvania

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Eric Ormsby replies:

While I am grateful to Professor Harmon for his letter of clarification, and take him at his word that no "surreptitious consultation" occurred between him and J. A. Underwood, I fear that yet again, as in his translation, he is being much too literal. I wanted mainly to emphasize the perplexing aura that often surrounds Kafka's work, even in translation. In fact, I could wish that such consultation, surreptitious or not, had taken place, for Professor Harmon's own version of *The Castle* might have been much improved: the Underwood translation, which I praised, has recently received an award in England for one of the best translations of the year.

Be that as it may, I must take exception to Professor Harmon's remark that my criticism of his version is based merely on personal "preference." To the contrary, I documented my objections; Professor Harmon's infelicities are both abundant and demonstrable, though I had space to cite only a few. Finally, as I made clear in the review, I did not object to Professor Harmon's criticisms of the Muirs' beautiful translations (though these are regarded as classics, and rightly so). Rather, I objected, and still object, to his snide, patronizing, and unjust characterization of Edwin and Willa Muir, both of whom deserved better.

"Absolute nonsense"

To the Editors:

I have just received a copy of Gary Saul Morson's review of our *Collected Tales of Nikolai Gogol* (translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, published by Pantheon), which appeared in your November 1998 issue. I hope it is not too late for me to respond to it, because it certainly merits a response.

There is an interesting Russian word that might be transliterated as *hamstvo*. It means insolent, self-satisfied loutishness, and derives ultimately from the name of Ham, the son of Noah, who saw his drunken father "uncovered" and went to tell his brothers about it, for which Noah cursed him. According to Andrei Sinyavsky, *hamstvo* came to be the characteristic quality of *homo sovieticus* and is the worst (and most lasting) product of the Soviet period. But *hamstvo* is by no means confined to Russia, as the present trial in the U.S. Senate shows. And apparently it threatens to become a new criterion in book reviewing as well.

At least Professor Morson's article seems to have been meant as a review of our collection of Gogol's tales. I hesitate because the reviewer never discusses the contents of the book and refers only to three of the thirteen tales in passing. In fact, he gives more space to arguing with an earlier review of the book (which he does not acknowledge as such) than the book itself. Of the three and a half pages of his article, only the last half of the last paragraph deals in any way with our work. The rest of it is devoted to a sort of encyclopedia entry on Gogol for the ignorant, discussing the author's life, his famous play *The Inspector General*, his famous novel *Dead Souls*, and his famous nose (both the tale and the organ). There are occasional hints of *hamstvo* along the way; for instance: "Everything is olfactory in Gogol, who had quite a schnoz himself." Excursuses on Gogol's nose have become a rather tedious commonplace of Gogol criticism, but Professor Morson also has a little joke of his own in mind. He is building up to the crushing final sentence of his review, which reads: "If you want to know what Gogol doesn't sound like, pick up this version and hold your nose."

There you have *hamstvo* in a pure state.

It is admittedly difficult to review a translation. The reviewer needs to have an equal knowledge of and feeling for two languages, and to have grasped what the art of translation involves. And then there is the sheer bother of comparing texts. I've rarely seen it done well. Bernard Guerney's translation of *Dead Souls*, which Nabokov praised (and which has now been reissued in a bowdlerized version by Susanne Fusso, described by Professor Morson as "even better") has been used as a stick to beat our translation of the same book, as have Nabokov's own renderings in his little study of Gogol written in 1944. But no reviewer has gone so far as to compare our version, along with Guerney's and Nabokov's, to the original tale—to take, for instance, just the opening paragraph of *Dead Souls*, which would have been easy enough to do. The results would show that Nabokov was often rather cavalier as a translator, and that Guerney's

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"upholstered" prose (as one reviewer admiringly called it) does not render any similar quality in Gogol's Russian. A reviewer who does not take the trouble to conceive what the task of translation involves or to make even the most minimal comparisons is not doing an honest job. Criticism by incantation is an intellectual dodge.

But it's one thing to have Nabokov waved at you and another to be dismissed with a rude and insolent sneer. Professor Morson says that our translation of Gogol's tales is "bedeviled by an almost perfect sense of the least apt choice" and that "anyone who knows Gogol will only be able to 'gasp and spit' at their tin ear." That (along with the crushing last sentence) is quite literally *all* he says about this 435 page book, which contains works of enormous stylistic variety and complexity, posing enormous problems for the translator. He doesn't give a single example; he doesn't make a single comparison. Shouldn't readers be offered a few instances of our collective "tin ear" in action? Doesn't such a sweeping claim require some substantiation? Professor Morson would have a hard time proving his case. But he has so little respect for his readers (not to mention the present translators) that he doesn't think he needs to. And that's where the *hamstvo* lies.

I'm surprised that *The New Criterion* finds this sort of reviewing acceptable.

Richard Pevear
Paris, France

Gary Saul Morson replies:
I was amused by Richard Pevear's response to my review, especially by his assumption that a detailed comparison of translations with the original belongs in *The New Criterion* rather than in *Slavic and East European Journal*. I was even more amused that, after objecting to my failure to sustain my dismissal of his translation with detailed examples, he does just the same to Susanne Fusso.

Pevear and Volokhonsky have translated several volumes of Dostoevsky and Gogol, and their versions have one great virtue: they are as close to literal as possible. They make excellent trots for the student learning Russian. But they suffer from a set of interrelated defects. The authors have no sense of English tone, and consistently pick words in the wrong register. Still worse, they do not understand the works they are translating. As readers familiar with Garnett or other versions will be aware, the key concept of *Notes from Underground* is "spite"—totally gratuitous harm inflicted on others or oneself, even against one's best interest. The concept is central to the underground man's attack on the rationalist and utilitarian view of man and has had profound influence on twentieth-century thought. The first sentence of the novel ("I am a sick man. . . . I am a spiteful man") is one of the most famous Dostoevsky wrote. But Pevear and Volokhonsky render the word as "wicked," rather than spiteful, here and elsewhere in their version. Now, the Russian word in question can indeed mean "wicked," and Garnett quite properly renders it as such when her version of *The Brothers Karamazov* has the narrator describe old Karamazov: "He was sentimental. He was wicked and sentimental." But to choose "wicked" for *Notes from Underground* can only reflect a failure to understand the book as a whole. This sort of problem is common in their work.

To translate literature, one must have a feel for the literary. Philosophers and artificial intelligence experts like to debate the famous Turing test: if one cannot tell from a machine's responses whether it is conscious, then it is. Pevear and Volokhonsky prove the reverse: one would guess that their versions were produced by a very sophisticated machine.

Queer theory in Russia

To the Editors:
In the February 1999 issue, on page three, you publish at the foot of the page a brief item under the heading "From the archives of academic publishing." The heading suggests that we are to be treated to some fresh inanity, some further instance of the silliness routinely generated in the contemporary academy—a silliness often remarked upon in the pages of *The New Criterion*.

But what follows, so far as I can tell, is not in the least silly or inane. The brief book description taken from the Spring 1999 catalogue of the trendy Duke University Press includes the following opening sentence: "In *Queer in Russia* Laurie Essig examines the formation of gay

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identity and community in the former Soviet Union." Subsequent sentences are similarly straightforward, which is to say, descriptive. They make no case, contain no polemical excesses. The book by Ms. Essig would seem to be a scholarly work asking legitimate questions about lives and institutions before and after *perestroika*. Nothing in the description of the book—again, so far as I can tell—would indicate that it is the product of a particular bias.

And so I ask a simple question: Do the editors of *The New Criterion* wish to suggest that any book devoted to studying the lives of gay people, no matter what it says, no matter its language or its disposition, is inevitably a reflection of the triviality, political correctness, or philistinism so often on display in the books coming out of our academic presses? Because I find it hard to suppose that this, indeed, is what the editors intended to convey in the excerpt taken from the Duke catalogue, and I can see no other motive for selecting this passage, I ask for some explanation. Surely the editors agree that the lives of gay people in the Soviet Union, or in any other country, are as fit a subject for scholarly investigation as any other. Or is there something here I have not understood?

Robert Boyers
Skidmore College
Editor, *Salmagundi*

The Editors reply:

Like the editors of *The New Criterion*, the editor of *Salmagundi* knows very well that there are certain politically correct priorities now governing the publications of many of our university presses, and high on the short list of top priorities are books in the recently created field of "Queer Studies." We consider it news that this form of academic political correctness has now been extended to the study of Russia, where for so many decades a somewhat different tradition of political correctness was enforced. Exactly why the editor of *Salmagundi* should now pretend not to know all this is a question we dare not attempt to answer, for that would involve speculation about his motives that would inevitably be invidious.

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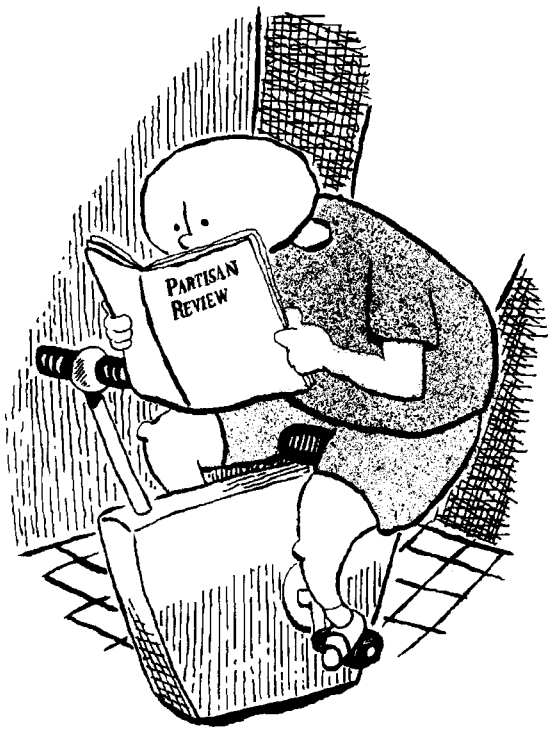

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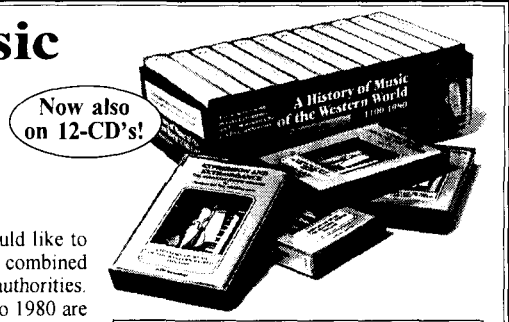

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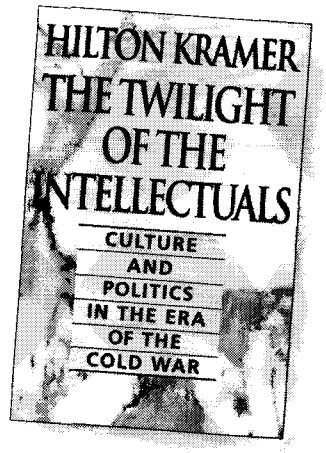

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